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Stanton.

GIOVANNI VERGA

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA

AND

OTHER TALES OF SICILIAN PEASANT LIFE

TRANSLATED BY

ALMA STRETTELL

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

M DCCC XCIII

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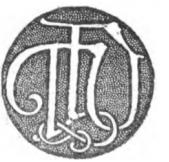

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

Giovanni Verga, the author of the celebrated "Cavalleria Rusticana" (on which tale Mascagni's opera is founded), is too well known to European fame as a writer on the peasant life of his native Sicily for the present selection from his tales to pass under a false signature: but the publisher, in apologising for breaking the rule, must plead in defence that as Verga's works have not hitherto been presented to the English public, the end in view in the present instance justifies the means in attaining it.

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CAVALLERÌA RUSTICANA.

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CAVALLERÌA RUSTICANA.

(" RUSTIC CHIVALRY.")

TURIDDU MACCA, the son of Mistress Nunzia, when he came back from serving his time as a soldier, used to show himself off every Sunday in the Piazza, in his *bersagliere's*[1] uniform and his red cap, so that he looked like the fortune-teller when he sets up his stall with the cageful of canary birds. The girls devoured him with their eyes as they went to mass, their noses hidden in the

[1] A well-known Italian regiment of light infantry.

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folds of their *mantelline* [1]; and all the urchins in the place buzzed about him like flies. He had brought back a pipe, too, with the king upon it, on horseback, as lifelike as possible; and he lit the matches on the seat of his trousers, raising his leg as if he were giving a kick.

But in spite of all this, Farmer Angelo's Lola had not shown herself anywhere, either at mass or on the dancing-floor, for she was engaged to be married to a man from Licodia, a waggoner by trade, who had four mules of the Sortino breed in his stable.

When first Turiddu heard of it, there was the devil to pay! "He was going to tear out the man from Licodia's vitals for for him, he was!" But he did nothing of the kind, and only vented his spleen by going to sing

[1] *Mantellina*—a short semi-circular cloth shawl worn on the head by the Sicilian peasant women; white ones by girls, and blue by married women.

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all the insulting songs he could think of under the lady's windows.

"Has Mistress Nunzia's Turiddu nothing to do," asked the neighbours, "that he spends his nights singing, like a lonely sparrow?"

At last he fell in with Lola, coming back from a pilgrimage to "Our Lady of Peril"; and when she saw him, she turned neither white nor red, just as though it had been none of her business.

"Blessed are the eyes that see you!" said he.

"Oh, Master Turiddu, they were telling me that you had come back at the beginning of the month."

"They tell me very different things!" he replied. "Is it true that you are to marry Master Alfio, the waggoner?"

"If it be the will of God!" answered Lola, pulling the two corners of her kerchief over her chin.

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"*You* do the will of God by playing fast and loose, just as it suits you best! And it was the will of God, then, that I was to come back from so far, only to hear this fine news, Mistress Lola!"

The poor fellow still tried to brave it out, but his voice had grown husky, and he walked behind the girl, rocking himself to and fro, while the point of his cap flapped about on his shoulders. It grieved her, in all conscience, to see him with that long face, yet she couldn't find it in her heart to delude him with fine words.

"Listen, Master Turiddu," she said at last; "let me catch up my companions. What would they say in the village if they saw me with you?"

"Quite true," answered Turiddu; "now that you are to marry Master Alfio, who has four mules in his stable, we mustn't make people talk. My poor mother, on the other hand,

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had to sell our bay mule and that bit of a vineyard by the high-road, while I was gone for a soldier. The days are passed when Queen Bertha span, and you don't any longer remember the time when we used to talk to each other from the window on the courtyard, and you gave me this handkerchief—God knows how many tears I've wept into it, going away so far that the very name of our village was lost to me. Good-bye, then, Mistress Lola; let us reckon 'that it has rained and grown fair again,' [1] and that our friendship is over."

Mistress Lola married the waggoner, and the following Sunday she appeared at the dance, with her hands spread out on her lap to show off all the thick gold rings that her husband had given her.

Turiddu went on passing up

[1] A proverb signifying "what is past is past."

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and down the little street with an indifferent air, his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets, ogling the girls; but in truth he was eating his heart out at the thought that Lola's husband had all that gold, and that she pretended not to notice him when he went by.

"I will pay her out to her very face, the bitch!" he would mutter.

Opposite to Master Alfio lived Farmer Cola, the vine-grower, who was as rich as a pig, they said, and had a daughter at home. Turiddu, by dint of much management, succeeded in getting engaged by Farmer Cola to watch his fields, and at once began to hang about the house, and to whisper sweet words to the girl.

"Why don't you go and say all these fine things to Mistress Lola?" Santa would reply.

"Mistress Lola is a grand lady! Mistress Lola has married a crowned king now!"

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"I am not good enough for a crowned king."

"You are worth a hundred of Lola, and I know some one who wouldn't look at Mistress Lola, nor at her patron saint, if you were by; for Mistress Lola isn't worthy to wear your shoes, that she isn't!"

"When the fox couldn't reach the grapes——"

"He said, 'How fair you are, my little cluster!'"

"O ho! those hands, Master Turiddu!"

"Are you afraid I shall eat you?"

"I am not afraid of you, nor of your god."

"Ah! your mother was from Licodia—we all know that! You have fiery blood! Uh! I could eat you with my eyes!"

"Eat me with your eyes as much as you please; we shall make no crumbs: but meanwhile, fetch me up that faggot."

"I'd fetch up the whole house for you, I would!"

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To avoid blushing, she threw at him a stump that lay at hand, and, for a wonder, did not hit him.

"Let us make haste; gossiping ties up no vine-faggots."

"If I were rich I would look for a wife like you, Mistress Santa."

"I shall not marry a crowned king like Mistress Lola; but *I* have my dowry too, when the Lord sends me some one."

"We know you are rich, that we do!"

"If you know it, then make haste, for here is father coming, and I don't want him to find me in the courtyard."

Her father began to make a wry face, but the girl pretended not to notice it, for the tassel of the *bersagliere's* cap had made a stir in her heart, and was always dancing before her eyes. When the father turned Turiddu out at the door, the daughter opened the window to him, and stayed chattering with him all the even-

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ing, so that the whole neighbourhood talked of nothing else.

"I am going out of my senses for you," Turiddu would say, "and losing my sleep and my appetite."—

"Nonsense!"—

"I wish I were the son of Victor Emmanuel himself, to marry you!"—

"Nonsense!"—

"By the Virgin, I could eat you like bread!"—

"Nonsense!"—

"Ah, upon my honour!"—

"*Ah, mamma mia!*"[1]

Lola used to listen every night, hidden behind her pot of basil, and she would grow pale and red. At last one day she called Turiddu.

"And so, Master Turiddu, we don't greet our old friends any more?"

"Ah," sighed the youth,

[1] "Oh, mother mine!"—a common ejaculation in Southern Italy.

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"blessed is he who may greet you!"

"If you have any intention of bringing me your greetings, you know where I live," Lola replied.

Turiddu went to greet her so often that Santa noticed it, and slammed the window in his face. The neighbours smiled at one another with a significant nod when the *bersagliere* went by. Lola's husband was making the round of the fairs with his mules.

"I must go to confession on Sunday," said Lola, "for I dreamed of black grapes last night."

"Let be, let be," implored Turiddu.

"No; now that we are getting near Easter, my husband would want to know why I hadn't been to confession."

"Ah!" muttered Farmer Cola's Santa, as she knelt awaiting her turn before the confessional where Lola was washing

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out her sins: "Upon my soul, I will not send you to Rome for your penance!"

Master Alfio came back with his mules laden with heavy *soldi*,[1] and brought, as a present to his wife, a beautiful new dress for the coming festival.

"You are right to bring her presents," their neighbour Santa said to him, "for whilst you are away your wife 'adorns the house' for you!"

Master Alfio was one of those waggoners who wear their cap on their ear, and when he heard his wife spoken of in this way he changed colour as if he had been stabbed. "A thousand devils!" he exclaimed. "If you have seen amiss, I will not leave you, nor a single one of your relations, an eye to weep with!"

"I am not wont to weep," replied Santa. "I did not weep even when with these very eyes

[1] *Soldo*—a copper piece worth rather less than a halfpenny; but the word is also used to mean money in general.

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I saw Turiddu go into your wife's house at night."

"Very good," answered Master Alfio, "and many thanks."

Turiddu, now that the cat had come home, no longer hung about the street by day, but tried to digest his spleen at the tavern with his friends; and on Easter Even they had a dish of sausages on the table. When Master Alfio came in, Turiddu understood, from the way he fixed his eyes upon him, that he had come about that business, and he laid his fork down on the dish.

"Have you any commands for me, Master Alfio?" he said.

"Nothing, Master Turiddu, only that I had not seen you for some time, and I wished to speak to you about the matter you know of."

At first Turiddu had offered him his glass, but Master Alfio put it aside. Then Turiddu rose and said to him—

"I am ready, Master Alfio."

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The waggoner threw his arms about his neck.

"If you will come to-morrow morning to the prickly-pear grove of Canziria, we can talk that matter over, comrade."

"Wait for me on the high-road at sunrise, and we will go there together."

With these words they exchanged, according to custom, the kiss of challenge, and Turiddu pressed the waggoner's ear between his teeth, as a solemn token that he would not fail him.

His friends had silently left their supper, and accompanied Turiddu to his own door. Mistress Nunzia, poor soul, waited up for him till late every evening. "Mother," Turiddu said to her, "do you remember, when I went for a soldier, how you thought I should never come back? Give me a good kiss, as you did then, for to-morrow morning I am going far."

Before daybreak he took his long clasp-knife, which he had

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hidden under the hay when he went as a conscript, and set off for the prickly-pear grove of Canziria.

"Oh! Jesu Mary! where are you going in such a hurry?" whimpered the terrified Lola, as her husband was passing out.

"I am going near by," replied Master Alfio; "but it would be better for you if I never came back."

Lola, in her shift, knelt praying at the foot of the bed, pressing to her lips the rosary that Fra Bernardino had brought her from the Holy Land, and reciting as many "Ave Marias" as she could get in.

"Master Alfio," began Turiddu, after walking along for a bit beside his companion, who kept silence, with his cap pulled over his eyes, "as there is a God above us, I know I am to blame, and I would let you kill me. But before coming away I saw my old woman, who had got up to see me start, under

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the pretence of attending to the poultry-yard—almost as if her heart had told her the truth; and as sure as there is a God, I will kill you like a dog, that my old woman may not have cause to weep."

"That is well," replied Master Alfio, pulling off his vest, "and we will hit hard, both of us."

They were both good fencers; Turiddu got the first blow, and was just in time to catch it on his arm; he gave a good one in return, and aimed at the groin.

"Ah, Master Turiddu, you really mean to kill me then!"

"Yes, I told you so; since I saw my old woman in the poultry-yard, I seem to have her always before my eyes."

"Open them well, those eyes of yours," cried Master Alfio, "for I am going to return you good measure!"

As he stood on guard, crouching down to hold his left hand on his wound, which pained him, and with his elbow almost touch-

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ing the ground, he hastily caught up a handful of dust and threw it into his adversary's eyes.

"Ah," yelled Turiddu, quite blinded, "I am a dead man!"

And he tried to save himself by making desperate backward bounds, but Master Alfio caught him up with another blow in the chest, and a third in the throat.

"That makes three! That for having 'adorned my house' for me. Now your mother will let her chickens be!"

Turiddu staggered about for a moment, gasping, among the prickly-pear bushes, and then fell like a log. The blood rose gurgling and foaming in his throat, and he could not even breathe, "*Ah, mamma mia!*"

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RED-HEADED MALPÉLO.

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RED-HEADED MALPÉLO.[1]

HE was called Malpélo because he had red hair, and he had red hair because he was a bad, malicious boy, who gave promise of turning out a rascal of the first order. So that every one at the mine of the red sand called him Malpélo, and even his mother, by dint of always hearing the word, had almost forgotten his real name. Besides, she only saw him on Saturdays, when he brought home the few pence that made up his week's earnings; and since

[1] The literal meaning of Malpélo is "evil hair," but applied as an epithet it is taken to mean *ill-conditioned, a bad sort.*

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he was Malpélo, there was always the fear that he might keep back some of the pence, so, considering the doubt, and to avoid mistakes, his sister would give him cuffs by way of a receipt.

However, the master of the mine gave his word for it that the pence ought to come to so much and no more; and indeed, they were more than enough for Malpélo—a little wretch whom none cared to have about them, and every one avoided like a mangy dog, and "caressed with their feet" whenever he was within reach. In sooth, his was an ugly, scowling face, surly and wild-looking. At midday, when the other workmen gathered in knots to eat their soup and take a little recreation together, he would sit huddled in a corner, his basket between his knees, and gnaw his stale, last week's bread, just like the brute beasts, his equals; and every one would crack jokes at his expense and throw stones at him, till the

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overseer sent him back to work with a kick.

Yet he seemed to thrive upon kicks, and would let himself be more heavily loaded than the grey ass, without daring to complain. He was always ragged, and soiled with the red sand, for his sister was engaged to be married, and had other things besides taking care of him to think about. Nevertheless he was well-known, not to say a by-word, throughout the whole district of Monserrato and Carvana, so that the mine where he worked was nicknamed "Malpélo's Mine," to the great annoyance of the owner. In fact, he only kept Malpélo on out of charity, and because his father, Master Misciu, had lost his life in the mine.

It had come about in this way. One Saturday evening Misciu had wanted to finish a certain piece of work taken on contract —the removal of a pillar formerly left as a prop in the mine, and now no longer of any use; he

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had reckoned by eye, with the owner, that it would be a matter of taking out thirty-five or forty loads of sand. Instead of which, Master Misciu had been digging for three days, and there was still enough to keep him at work half through the Monday. It had been a poor bargain, and only a blockhead like Master Misciu would have let himself be so taken in; in fact, he was called Master Misciu the Donkey, and was the beast of burden of the whole mine. He, poor devil, let them say what they pleased, and was content to work for his bread with his two hands, instead of laying on to his comrades with them, and stirring up quarrels. Malpélo's face would darken, as though all these affronts fell on his own head, and young as he was, there was a look in his eyes that made the others say, "Go along, *you* will not die in your bed, like your father." After all, his father did not die in his bed, for all he

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was a good-natured beast. Uncle Mommu, the cripple, said he would not have moved that pillar for twenty "ounces,"[1] it was such dangerous work. But then everything is dangerous in a mine, and if one is to stay thinking of the danger, it is better to go and be a lawyer.

On the Saturday evening, then, Master Misciu was still scraping away at his pillar, though it was some time since the Ave Maria had sounded, and all his companions had lit their pipes and gone off, advising him "to go on amusing himself, slaving away for love of the master," and warning him against "dying the death of the mouse."

He, being used to gibes, paid no heed, and his only reply was the "ah, ah" of his heavy strokes with the spade into the thick of the sand. Now and then he would mutter, "This is for the bread—that for the wine—this

[1] *Oncia*—a Sicilian coin worth about 10s., now no longer current.

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for Nunzia's new petticoat," and so he went on, reckoning how he should spend the money of his bargain—the contractor!

Outside the mine the sky sparkled with stars, and down there the lantern smoked, turning round and round like a weather-cock; and the great red pillar, undermined by the strokes of the pick, writhed and bent over as though it had the belly-ache and were saying, "Ahi, ahi," also.

Malpélo worked away, clearing the ground and putting the great pick, the empty sack, and the wine-flask into safe places. His father, who was fond of him, poor fellow, kept saying, "Stand back," "Take care," "Look out for the pebbles and lumps of sand above there."

On a sudden he ceased speaking; Malpélo, who had turned away to put the tools into the basket, heard a dull, smothered sound, such as the sand makes when it falls all at once—and the light went out.

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That evening, when they came in desperate haste to fetch the engineer of the works, he was at the theatre, and would not have exchanged his seat for a throne, for he was a great dilettante. Rossi was playing Hamlet, and there was a splendid house.

At the door of the theatre he was surrounded by all the women-folk of Monserrato, screaming and beating their breasts by way of announcing the terrible disaster that had befallen Mistress Santa. She, poor creature, was the only one who said nothing, but her teeth chattered as though it had been January. The engineer, when they told him the accident had happened about four hours ago, asked what they came to him for, after four hours. Nevertheless he went to the spot, with ladders and torches flaring in the wind, and they spent two more hours there, which made six in all—and the cripple said it would take a week to clear the gallery of all the stuff that had fallen.

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Forty loads of sand, indeed! There had fallen a mountain of sand, all so fine, and burnt through by the lava, that one could have mixed it into paste with one's hands, and there would certainly have to be a double quantity of lime used with it. It would take weeks to cart away. A fine bargain Master Misciu the Donkey had made!

The engineer went back to see Ophelia buried, and the other miners shrugged their shoulders and turned homewards one by one. In all the commotion and chatter, no one had paid any heed to a child's voice, which had lost all human sound, and kept crying, "Dig here, dig here, quick, quick!"

"Hallo," said the cripple, "it's Malpélo. Where did he turn up from? If he hadn't been Malpélo he'd never have escaped—never!" The others began to laugh, and one said Malpélo had the devil on his side, and another that he had a tough skin, like the cats!

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Malpélo neither answered nor wept, but went on digging with his nails in the sand; he was deep down in the hole, so that no one had seen him before, and when they turned the light on him they beheld such a distorted face, with glassy eyes and foam at the mouth, as was enough to terrify any one; his nails were torn off and hung from his bleeding hands.

When the time came to get him away from the place, they had a bad job of it; being no longer able to scratch, he bit like a mad dog, and they were obliged to lay hold of his hair in order to drag him away.

However, he returned to the mine after a day or two, when his mother, sobbing, led him there by the hand; for there are times when one can't go about seeking where to earn one's bread. Indeed, he would not leave that particular gallery, and dug there with a vengeance, almost as though each basketful

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of sand were a weight lifted off his father's breast. Sometimes he would pause suddenly, his spade uplifted, while, with darkening face and wild eyes, he seemed to be listening to something that his demon whispered in his ears from the other side of the mountain of fallen sand.

In those days he was more downcast and sullen than usual, so that he would scarcely eat, but threw his bread to the dog, just as though it hadn't been "the gift of God." The dog loved him, for dogs notice nothing except the hand that feeds them. But on the grey ass, a poor, lean, crook-legged beast, Malpélo vented all his evil humours; he would beat it without mercy with the handle of the spade, muttering, "You will die all the sooner for it."

After his father's death he really seemed possessed, and worked like those savage buffaloes that have to be kept with a ring in their nose. Knowing

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that he was "Malpélo," he determined to be as bad as possible; and if an accident happened, or a workman lost his tools, or an ass broke its leg, or there was a fall of sand in some gallery, it was always sure to be his fault; and indeed he took all the blows without protest, just as the donkeys do, bending their backs—yet going on in their own way.

But with the other boys he was downright cruel, and seemed as though he wanted to revenge himself on the weaklings for all the harm that, as he fancied, had been done to him and his father. Certainly he showed a strange delight in recalling every instance of the hard treatment and ill-usage they had made his father endure, and the way they had let him die. When he was alone he would repeat to himself, "That's the way they use me too, and they called my father 'Donkey,' because he did not do as they did." And once, as the master went by, he muttered, following him with a

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lowering glance, "It was he that did it—for thirty-five *tarì*."[1] And again, behind the cripple's back, "He, too—and he began to laugh —I heard him, that evening."

By a refinement of cruelty he seemed to have taken under his wing a poor boy who had recently come to work in the mine, having fallen from a scaffolding and dislocated his thigh-bone, so that he could no longer follow his calling as a bricklayer's labourer.

The poor little fellow, when he carried his basket of sand on his shoulder, twisted himself till he looked as if he were dancing the tarantella, and made all the miners laugh, so that they nicknamed him Ranocchio, or Froggy. Yet he managed, frog though he was, to earn his bread working underground; and Malpélo, too, gave him some of his, in order to have the satisfaction, as he said, of tyrannising over him. Indeed,

[1] *Tarì*—a Sicilian coin, now no longer current, worth about 4½d.

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he tormented him in a thousand ways. Sometimes he would beat him without motive or mercy, and if Ranocchio did not stand up to him he would hit him harder and more furiously, saying, "Take that, donkey!—donkey that you are! If you haven't the spirit to defend yourself against me, who don't hate you, it means you will always let any one who pleases kick you in the face." Or, as Ranocchio wiped away the blood that streamed from his mouth and nostrils, "Now, when the pain of the blows begins to burn you, perhaps you'll learn to give some yourself."

When he drove a heavily-laden ass up the steep underground slope, and saw it pointing its hoofs and staggering beneath the burden, quite spent with panting breath and glassy eyes, he would beat it unmercifully with the handle of the spade, so that the blows sounded hollow upon the shins and the bare ribs.

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Sometimes the poor beast would bend quite double beneath the blows, and being, in its extremity, unable to take another step, would fall on its knees; there was one that had fallen so often, it had a wound on either leg.

Then Malpélo would confide to Ranocchio, "that the ass must be beaten, because he cannot hit back; if he could, he would trample us under his feet, and tear our flesh from our bones with his teeth." Or, "If you have to give blows," he would say, "try and give them as hard as you can; then those on whom they fall will take you for more of a man than themselves, and so you will get fewer on your own shoulders."

When he worked with pick or spade, he went at it with a furious energy, as though he had a spite against the sand, and would give stroke upon stroke with set teeth, making those sounds of "ah, ah," as his father used to do.

"The sand is treacherous,"

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said he to Ranocchio under his breath, "it is like all the rest, who smash your face if they see you are the weaker; but if you are the stronger, or get others on your side, as the cripple does, then it gives way. My father was always striking the sand, but he struck nothing else—that was why they called him 'Donkey'—and the sand swallowed him by stealth, because it was the strongest."

Whenever Ranocchio had work that was too heavy for him and was whimpering over it like a girl, Malpélo would thump him on the back, shouting, "Be quiet, chicken;" but if Ranocchio couldn't get done with it, he would lend him a helping hand, saying, with a certain pride, "Let me do it, I'm stronger than you." Or he would give him his half onion, and put up with dry bread himself, observing, with a shrug of the shoulders, "I'm used to it."

He was used to everything—

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to cuffs and kicks, and blows with the handle of a shovel or the girths of a pack-saddle—to being sworn at and mocked by every one—to sleeping on a heap of stones, with his back and arms aching with fourteen hours of work; used to fasting, too, for the master was wont to punish him by taking away his bread or his soup. He remarked that the master never took away his rations of blows — but then, blows cost nothing.

He never complained, however, but revenged himself by stealth, in underhand ways, and with such tricks as really seemed to smack of the devil's handiwork; so he invariably got all the punishments, even when he was not guilty; for if he was not that time, he was quite capable of being so, and he never justified himself—indeed, it would have been useless.

Sometimes, when Ranocchio, terrified, would implore him with tears to speak the truth and

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clear himself, he would repeat, "What is the use—I am Malpélo," and no one could say whether this persistent bowing of the head and shoulders were the result of a grim pride or of a desperate resignation, or tell whether his behaviour arose from savagery or from timidity. It was certain that his mother had never had a caress from him, and so she never gave him any. On Saturday evenings when he appeared at home with that face of his, all stained with freckles and red sand, and those rags that dangled about him on every side, his sister took the broomstick to him if he dared to stand in the doorway in that trim, for it would have frightened away her sweetheart had he seen the sort of brother-in-law there was in store for him. And his mother was always at one or other of the neighbours' houses; so he used to go in and crouch down upon his bit of sacking like a sick dog.

Then on Sundays, when all

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the other boys of the neighbourhood put on their clean shirts and went to mass, or played about in the courtyard, he seemed to have no amusement but to go loafing about the orchards, throwing stones at the poor little lizards who had never done him any harm, or rifling the hedges of prickly-pear. Indeed, he did not care to go near the other children, only to be mocked and pelted with stones.

Master Misciu's widow was in despair at having such a son —a "bad lot," as every one called him; and things at last grew to such a pitch that he became like one of those dogs that, by dint of being kicked and pelted with stones by every one, end in putting their tails between their legs and running from every living soul, so that they grow starved, mangy, and savage as wolves. Underground there, in the sand-mine, they at least no longer mocked him, hungry, ragged, and half-clad

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though he was; and in truth he seemed made for that work, even by the colour of his hair, and because of his great cat's eyes, that blinked when they saw the sun. There are donkeys like that, which work in mines for years and years, without ever coming out; for in those subterranean galleries which are reached by a vertical shaft, they are let down by ropes and stay there as long as they live. They are old asses, it is true, bought for twelve or thirteen francs, instead of being taken to the "Plaja" and knocked on the head—but they are good enough for the work they have to do down there. Malpélo was certainly worth no more, and if he got out on Saturday nights, it was only because he had hands wherewith to cling to the ropes, and was obliged to take home his week's pay to his mother.

To be sure, he would have preferred being a bricklayer, as Ranocchio had been—to work,

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singing, up there on the scaffoldings, in the midst of the blue sky, with the sun on one's back: or a waggoner, like Master Gaspare, who came to fetch the sand from the mine, swinging sleepily on the shafts, and smoking his pipe, and travelling all day along the beautiful country roads. Or, better still, to be a peasant, who spends his life in the green fields under the shady carob-trees, with the turquoise-blue sea there in the distance, and the song of the birds overhead. But mining had been his father's work, and to that work he, too, was born. And when he thought over all this, he would show Ranocchio the pillar that had fallen upon his father, and whence fine, well-burnt sand still kept slipping down—sand that the waggoner used to come and fetch, with his pipe in his mouth as he rode swinging on the shafts. Then he would tell Ranocchio that when they had done excavating they would find his father's body,

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on which there should be a pair of fustian trousers as good as new. Ranocchio was frightened —but not he. He went on telling how he had always been there from a child—had always seen the great black hole opening into the underground depths, whither his father was wont to lead him by the hand. Then he stretched out his arms right and left, describing how the intricate labyrinth of galleries spread out under their feet on every side, as far as, above ground, the black and desolate lava-plain extended, spotted with patches of scorched broom. And how so many men had perished down there, either crushed to death, or lost in the dark—and how these last had wandered about for years, and were wandering still, without being able to find the entrance of the shaft they came in by, or to hear the despairing shouts of their children, who seek for them in vain.

But one day when, in filling

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the baskets, they found one of Master Misciu's shoes, Malpélo was seized with such a tremor, that they had to draw him up to the open air with ropes, just like a donkey that is about to "kick the wind." However, they could not find either the trousers that were as good as new, or the rest of Master Misciu, though the experts asserted that this was the exact spot where the pillar had fallen on him; and one labourer, new to the work, remarked curiously, how capricious the sand seemed to be, that it had knocked Master Misciu about so—his shoes one way and his feet another. After that shoe was found, Malpélo was taken with such a dread of seeing his father's naked foot appear likewise among the sand, that he would not give another stroke with the spade there—"let them rather hit him over the head with it, if they pleased." He went to work on the other side of the gallery, and would not return to that

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part any more. Two or three days after, they did, in fact, discover Master Misciu's body, with the trousers on, as good as new, lying face downwards, and as if it were embalmed.

Uncle Mommu observed that he must have died a lingering death, as the pillar had formed an arch over him and buried him alive. One could even see that he had instinctively tried to free himself by digging through the sand, for his hands were torn and his nails broken.

"Just like his son," the cripple kept repeating, "he was digging on that side, while his boy was digging on this."

But they said nothing of it to the lad, knowing him to be bad and revengeful.

The waggoner rid the mine of the corpse, just as he cleared away the fallen sand and the dead donkeys—all the more, that this time, besides the fact that the carcase stank, it was a carcase of "baptised flesh."

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And the widow took in the trousers and the shirt and made them up for Malpélo, who was thus, for the first time, dressed in new clothes almost from head to foot. But the shoes were put aside till he should be grown up, since they couldn't be taken in, and his sister's sweetheart would have nothing to do with the dead man's shoes.

Malpélo would smooth the fustian trousers, as good as new, upon his legs, and think that they felt smooth and soft like his father's hands, that used to stroke his hair, rough and red though it was. He kept the shoes hung upon a nail above his bed of sacking, almost as though they had been the Pope's slippers; and on Sundays he would take them down, polish them, and try them on; and then stand them side by side upon the floor, and sit looking at them for hours and hours, with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hand, turning

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over who can tell what notions in that brain of his.

He had strange notions, had Malpélo. Insomuch as he had also inherited his father's pick and spade, he would insist on using them, though they were too heavy for his age—and when they offered to buy them of him, for the same price as new ones, he answered, "No, his father's hands upon the handles had made them all smooth and shining, and he could not make any others more smooth and shining than these —not if he worked with them for twice a hundred years."

About this time the grey ass died of hard work and old age, and the waggoner took it away and threw it far out among the lava-fields.

"That's the way," muttered Malpélo, "the tools that are of no more use are thrown away."

He used to go and look at the carcase of the "grey," at the bottom of the ravine, and forced

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Ranocchio to go too, though he would rather not have done so; but Malpélo would tell him that in this world one must get used to looking everything, whether beautiful or ugly, in the face; and he used to stand watching, with a boy's eager curiosity, the dogs that flocked from all the neighbouring farms to fight over the carcase of the "grey." The dogs fled yelping when the boys appeared, and prowled about on the opposite bank, whining with eagerness; but Red-head would not suffer Ranocchio to drive them away with stones.

"Do you see that black bitch," he would say, "that does not fear your pelting? She does not fear you, because she is hungrier than the rest. Just see her ribs!"

The grey ass no longer suffered now, but lay at rest with his four legs outstretched, and let the dogs disport themselves, emptying his deep eye-sockets and stripping his white bones; and

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the teeth that tore at his vitals could not now make him bend his back, as the lightest blow with the spade-handle used to do, that they gave to put a little spirit into him, as he struggled up the steep underground way. So things go! The "grey," too, had had his share of blows with spade and reins — he, too, when he staggered under the burden and his breath failed him, had a look in his eyes, as they beat him, that seemed to say, "No more, no more." But now the dogs eat his eyes, and he laughs at the blows with spade and reins—laughs with his fleshless mouth, that looks all teeth. And it would have been better had he never been born.

The lava-plain stretched away, sad and desolate, as far as the eye could reach, rising and falling in hillocks and ravines, rough and black, with never a grasshopper that chirped on it, or a bird that flew over it. No sound could be heard—not even the pick-strokes

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of the men working underground. And Malpélo would keep repeating that everywhere underfoot it was hollowed out in galleries, in all directions, toward the mountain and toward the valley, so that once a miner had gone in with black hair and come out with his hair snow-white; and another, whose torch was extinguished, vainly cried for help, but no one could hear him.

"He alone hears his own cries," said Malpélo, and at the thought, though his heart was harder than the lava, he trembled. "The master often sends me far in, where others are afraid to go; but I am Malpélo, and if I never return, no one will go and look for me."

In spite of all this, during the fine summer nights the stars shone out in their splendour, even above the lava-fields, and then the surrounding country looked black as the lava itself, and Malpélo, weary with the long day's work, would stretch him-

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self on his sack, his face turned up to the sky, to enjoy the stillness and the illumination up there on high. Hence he hated moonlit nights, when the sea is alive with light, and the landscape shows dimly here and there—then the lava looks more bare and desolate.

"For us who are made to work underground," thought Malpélo, "it should be dark always and everywhere."

An owl screeched and fluttered hither and thither, and he said to himself—"Even the owl can smell the dead who are here underground, and is frantic because she can't get at them."

Ranocchio was afraid of owls and bats, but Red-head scolded him for it, because those who are obliged to be alone should fear nothing, and even the grey ass was not afraid of the dogs that tore him, now that his flesh could not feel the pain of being devoured.

"You were used to work on

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the roofs, like the cats," said he, "and that was another matter, but now that you have to live underground, like a rat, you must not fear rats, or bats — who are old rats with wings. And rats like to live among the dead."

But Ranocchio showed a far greater inclination to talk about the stars, and delighted in explaining to Malpélo what they were doing up there, and he would tell him that Paradise is there on high, where the dead go who have been good, and given no pain to their parents.

"Who told you so?" Malpélo would ask.

And Ranocchio replied that his mother had told him so. Then Malpélo scratched his head, and smiling with the air of a sharp boy who knows a thing or two—

"Your mother tells you that, because, instead of breeches, you ought to wear a petticoat," he said. And after thinking it

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over a while, "My father was so good, never doing any one any harm, that they even called him 'Donkey.' And *he* is down there, underground; and they found his very tools and shoes, and these trousers I have on."

Not long after, Ranocchio, who had been failing for some time, became so ill that they were obliged to bring him out of the mine every evening on the ass's back, stretched out among the baskets, and shaking with fever like a wet chicken. One of the workmen said that the lad would never "make bone" at that business, and that one must be born in a mine to be able to work there without its being the death of one. Then Malpélo felt proud that he had been born in the mine, and continued so well and strong in that unwholesome air, with all that hard work. He would carry Ranocchio on his back, and try and cheer him up in his own fashion, scolding

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and thumping him. But once when he hit him on the back, Ranocchio was seized with a violent bleeding at the mouth; and then Malpélo, in a fright, tried to discover, by looking in his mouth and nose, what he could have done to him, swearing he couldn't have hurt him so much with such a blow as that—to prove which he kept hitting himself hard on the back and chest with a stone; and a workman too, who was by, gave him such a tremendous kick on the shoulders that it resounded as if on a drum, yet Malpélo never budged, and only when the man was gone, said—

"Do you see, he did me no harm, and yet he hit harder than I did, I swear!"

Nevertheless Ranocchio got no better, but went on spitting blood, and had fever every day. Then Malpélo stole pence from his week's pay to buy him wine and hot soup, and gave him the trousers, "as good as new,"

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because they kept him warmer. Yet Ranocchio always coughed, and seemed almost smothering at times, and in the evening there was no way of overcoming the chill of the fever, either by covering him up with sacks and straw, or putting him in front of the fire. Malpélo would crouch over him, silent and motionless, with his hands on his knees, gazing at him with great, wide eyes, as though he would have taken his picture; and when he heard him moaning under his breath, and saw how drawn his face was, and how dim his eye—just like that of the grey ass when he panted with exhaustion under his load as he climbed the slope—then he would mutter, "It is better you should die soon. If you are to suffer like that, you had better die."

And the master said Malpélo was capable of knocking the lad on the head, and that he must be watched.

At last, one Monday, Ranoc-

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chio came no more to the mine, and the master washed his hands of him, for his state was such that he was more trouble than anything else. Malpélo found out where he lived, and on Saturday went to see him.

Poor Ranocchio was nearer the other side than this, and his mother was weeping and making as much ado as if her boy had been one of those who earn ten francs a week. Malpélo could not make this out, and asked Ranocchio why his mother cried so, when for two months past he had scarcely earned the bread he ate. But poor Ranocchio paid no heed to him, and seemed intent on counting the rafters in the ceiling. Then Red-head began to fancy that Ranocchio's mother must be weeping so because her son had always been weak and sickly, and she had cossetted him up, like one of those children who are weaned over-late; whereas *he* was strong and healthy, and was "mal-

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pélo" too, so that his mother had never cried over *him*, because she had never feared to lose him.

Soon after, they said in the mine that Ranocchio was dead, and Malpélo thought that now the owl would screech for him too, at night; and he went again to look at the bare bones of the "grey," in the ravine where he used to go with Ranocchio. Nothing was left of the "grey" now but a skeleton, and soon it would be the same with Ranocchio; and his mother would dry her eyes, since Malpélo's mother, too, had dried her eyes after Master Misciu's death, and had married again and gone to live at Cifali; and his sister, too, was married and had shut up the house. Henceforward they would no longer care if he got beaten, and he didn't care either, and when he became like the "grey," or like Ranocchio, he would feel nothing any more.

About this time there came to

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work in the mine a man who had never been seen there, and who kept himself as much hidden as possible. The other workmen said among themselves that he had escaped from prison, and that if he were caught they would shut him up there again for years and years. Then Malpélo learnt that a prison is a place where they put thieves, and rascals like him, and shut them up close and keep a watch on them. From that moment he felt a morbid curiosity concerning the man who had known the inside of a prison and had escaped from it.

But after a few weeks the fugitive openly and roundly declared that he was weary of that mole's life, and that he would sooner be a convict for the rest of his days; for a prison, compared to this sort of life, was paradise, and he would rather go back there of his own accord.

"Then why doesn't every one who works in a mine get

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put into prison?" inquired Malpélo.

"Because they are not all 'malpélo,' like you," replied the cripple; "but make your mind easy—you'll go there, and leave your bones there too."

Instead, however, Malpélo left his bones in the mine, as his father had, but in a different way.

One day there was a passage to be explored, which was thought to communicate with the great shaft on the left of the mine, towards the valley. If this turned out to be the fact, a good half of the labour of taking the sand out would be saved; but if, on the other hand, it was a mistake, then there was the danger of losing one's way and never coming back. So that no father of a family would venture upon the enterprise, nor would any have suffered their own flesh and blood to run such a risk for all the gold in the world.

But as for Malpélo, there was

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no one left to sell his skin for all the gold in the world, even supposing it had been thought worth it; his mother had married again and gone away to live at Cifali, and his sister was married too. The door of the house was shut, and he had nothing left but his father's shoes hanging on the nail. So it was always to him that the most dangerous work and the most hazardous undertakings were entrusted, and if he did not look out for himself, certainly no one else did so for him.

When they sent him on this exploration he remembered the miner who had lost his way years and years before, and still walks on in the dark, crying for help, without being able to make any one hear—but he said nothing. After all, what use would it have been?

He took his father's things, the pick, the spade, the lantern, the bag of bread and the flask of wine, and went away—nor was

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he ever heard of again. So even the bones of Malpélo were lost, and the boys of the mine lower their voices when they speak of him in the underground passages, for they are afraid of seeing him appear before them, with his red hair and his great grey eyes.

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GRAMIGNA'S MISTRESS.

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GRAMIGNA'S MISTRESS.

THIS is no more than the sketch of a story, but it has the merit of being very short, and of being historical—a human document, as they say nowadays; and as such will perhaps be interesting to those who study the great book of the heart. I will tell it just as I heard it myself among the fields and country lanes; almost with the same simple and picturesque words as are used in the popular narrative.

Some years ago, down in the district of the Simeto, they were hunting a brigand; one Gra-

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migna, if I mistake not—and that is as ill a name as the weed that bears it—who had filled the whole country-side with the terror of his renown.

Police, soldiery, and mounted militia had pursued him for two months, and had never succeeded in fastening their claws upon him; he was alone, but he was as good as ten others, and the evil weed threatened to take root.

To make matters worse, it was nearly harvest time, the hay already lay scattered upon the meadows, and the ears of corn bowed their heads, as if nodding consent to the reapers, who were ready with sickle in hand; and yet not a single farmer dared show his nose beyond his garden hedge, for fear of finding Gramigna lying among the furrows, his carbine between his knees, ready to blow out the brains of the first man who should offer to meddle with him.

Hence the complaints were

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universal. So the prefect summoned before him all these gentlemen of the police, the "*carabinieri*," and the soldiery, and said a few words to them of a kind that made them prick up their ears. The next day there was a general earthquake: patrols, troops, vedettes in every ditch and behind every wall—they drove him before them like a wild beast, through a whole province, by day and by night, on foot, on horseback, and by the telegraph. Still Gramigna slipped through their hands, and answered them with volleys of shot when they trod too closely on his heels. In the fields, in the villages, at the farms, beneath the boughs that overshadow the tavern doors, in every place of meeting, people talked of nothing but him, Gramigna, and that furious chase, that desperate flight.

The *carabinieri's* horses dropped down from sheer weariness, the worn-out soldiers flung them-

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selves to rest upon the ground in every stable, the patrols fell asleep as they walked. Only he, Gramigna, was never weary, never slept, but still fled on, clambering up precipices, creeping among the corn, crawling on all fours through the thickets of prickly pear, scrambling like a wolf along the dry torrent-beds. The principal topic of conversation among the gossips at the village doors, was the consuming thirst that the hunted creature must be enduring, down there on the vast, arid plain, beneath the June sun. The idlers stood agape at the very thought.

Peppa, one of the handsomest girls of Licodia, was at this time about to be married to Master Finu, surnamed "the Tallow-candle," who owned sunny lands and had a bay mule in his stable, and was a fine young fellow, "beautiful as the sun," who could carry the banner of St. Margaret as straight as a pillar, without bending his back. Pep-

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pa's mother wept for joy at the good luck that had befallen her daughter, and spent her time in turning over the bride's outfit as it lay in its trunk—"all of white stuff, in fours," like that of a queen, and golden earrings that hung down to the shoulders, and gold rings for all the ten fingers; she had as much gold as St. Margaret herself, and was to be married just about St. Margaret's Day, which fell in June, after the hay was cut. Every evening, "Tallow-candle," as he returned from the fields, would leave his mule at Peppa's door, and come in to tell her that the crops were a joy to behold, if only Gramigna did not set fire to them, that the corn-bin behind the bed would not be large enough to hold all the grain that harvest, and that it seemed to him a thousand years till the time should come when he might take his bride home behind him on the bay mule.

But one fine day Peppa said

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to him, "Let your mule be—for I will not marry you."

Poor "Tallow-candle" stood aghast, and the old woman began tearing her hair when she heard her daughter give up the best match in the village.

"I love Gramigna," the girl said to her, "and I will marry no one else."

"Ah me!" the mother went crying about the house, her grey hair flying in the wind like a witch's—"Ah me! that demon has got even in here and bewitched my daughter!"

"No," Peppa would reply, and her eye was fixed and as hard as steel, "no, he has not been here."

"Where have you seen him, then?"

"I have not seen him, I have heard of him. But listen—I feel him, here, burning me."

The affair made a stir in the village, though they tried to hush it up. The gossips who had envied Peppa the prosperous

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crops, the bay mule, and the fine young fellow who carried St. Margaret's banner without bending his back, now went about telling all manner of ugly tales —how Gramigna came to visit her by night in the kitchen, and how he had been seen hiding under the bed.

The poor mother had a lamp lighted "for the souls in purgatory," and the priest even came to the house and laid his stole upon Peppa's heart, so as to drive out that devil of a Gramigna, who had taken possession of it. Still she persisted in saying that she did not even know the fellow by sight, but that she saw him at night in her dreams; and she rose every morning with parched lips, almost as though she, too, had suffered the burning thirst that he must be enduring.

Then the old woman shut her up in the house, that she might no longer hear them talk of Gramigna, and stopped up the

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very cracks in the door with pictures of the saints. But Peppa listened from behind the sacred images to what the people in the street were saying, and grew red and pale, as though the devil were blowing all the flames of hell across her face. At last she heard them say that Gramigna had been brought to bay, among the prickly-pear thickets of Palagonia.

"He kept up a two hours' fire," they said, "and there is one *carabiniere* killed, and three soldiers, and more, are wounded. But they sent such a hail of shot upon him, that this time they found a pool of blood where he had stood."

Then Peppa made the sign of the cross at her old woman's bedside, and fled through the window.

Gramigna was among the prickly pears of Palagonia, for they had not been able to dislodge him from such a rabbit-warren. Wounded and blood-

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stained, pale from a two days' fast, burnt with fever, he stood there, his carbine levelled.

When he saw her coming towards him, fearless and firm, through the thickets of prickly pear, in the dim light of the dawn, he debated for a moment whether he should pull the trigger.

"What do you want," he asked; "what have you come here for?"

"I have come to be with you," she replied, looking at him fixedly. "Are you Gramigna?"

"Yes, I am Gramigna. If you have come here after those twenty 'ounces'[1] of the reward, you have mistaken your reckoning."

"No, I have come to stay by you," she replied.

"Get you gone," said he; "you cannot stay here, and I will have no one with me. If you

[1] *Oncia*—a Sicilian coin, no longer current, worth about 10s.

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have come after money, you have made a mistake, I tell you; I have nothing—see; it is two days since I have even had a bit of bread."

"I cannot go home again now," she said; "the road is full of soldiers."

"Go! What do I care for that? Every one for himself!"

As she was turning away, like a dog driven off by kicks, he called after her—

"Look here, go and get me a flask of water from the torrent down there; if you want to stay with me, you must risk your skin."

She went without a word; and when Gramigna heard the fusilade, he laughed out, saying to himself, "That was meant for me!"

But when he saw her return in a little while, pale and bleeding, with the flask on her arm, first he tore it from her, and drank so long and deep a draught that his very breath failed him,

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and then—"Did you escape it?" he asked; "how did you manage?"

"The soldiers were on the opposite bank, and on this side the bushes were thick."

"But they put a bullet into you? Your clothes are stained with blood."

"Yes."

"Where are you wounded?"

"In the shoulder."

"That's no matter—you can still walk."

So he suffered her to stay with him. She followed him, barefooted, all torn and feverish from her wound; she would go hunting after a flask of water or a crust of bread for him, and when she returned empty-handed, amid the volleys of shot, her lover, devoured by hunger and thirst, would beat her. At last, one night when the moon shone brightly through the thickets of prickly pear, Gramigna said, "They are coming," and made her stand with her back against

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a rock at the bottom of a cleft; then he fled in the opposite direction.

The shots echoed nearer and nearer among the bushes, and the darkness was lighted up by sudden bursts of flame. All at once Peppa heard a trampling close by, and Gramigna reappeared, dragging himself along, with one leg broken, so that he had to prop himself against the shoots of the prickly pear to reload his carbine.

"It is over," he said; "now they will take me."

And what froze her blood more than all was the glitter in his eye, that made him look like a madman. Then, when he fell like a log upon the dead branches, the soldiers were upon him, all at once.

Next day they dragged him on a cart through the streets of the village, mangled and bleeding. The crowd that pressed round to gaze at him, laughed when they saw how small and pale and ugly

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he was, like a clown. It was for him that Peppa had left Master Finu, the "Tallow-candle"!

Poor "Tallow-candle" went away and hid himself, as though it were his part to be ashamed.

And Peppa was led along between the soldiers, handcuffed, as if she, too, had been a thief—she, who had as much gold as St. Margaret.

Her poor mother had to sell all the "white stuff" of the bridal outfit, and the golden earrings, and the rings for the ten fingers, to pay lawyers for her daughter, and get her home again once more, poor, sickly, and shame-faced — ugly, too, now, like Gramigna, and with Gramigna's child upon her bosom. Yet when she was restored to her at the end of the trial, the old woman recited the "Ave Maria" there in the bare and fast-darkening barrack-room, among all the *carabinieri*; it was as though they had given her back a treasure—to her, the poor old

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woman who had nothing else in the world, and she wept like a fountain for joy.

But Peppa seemed to have no more tears left, and she spoke never a word; nor did the village folk ever see her again, though the two women had to work with their hands for their daily bread. People said that Peppa had learnt her trade, there in the wood, and that she went out thieving by night. In reality, she sat crouching in a corner of the kitchen, like a wild beast, and only left it when her old woman was dead of hard work, and she had to sell the house.

"Do you see, now!" the "Tallow-candle" said to her, for he loved her still, "I could crush your head between two stones for all the harm you have done to yourself and others."

"It is true," Peppa answered, "I know it. It was the will of God."

When the house and her few remaining goods and chattels

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were sold, she left the village by night, as she had come—without turning back to give one look at the roof beneath which she had slept so long—and went away with her boy to do the will of God in the city, near the prison where Gramigna was shut up.

She could only see the dark shutters upon the great, silent face of the building, and when she stood looking at it, trying to make out where he might be, the sentries drove her away. At last they told her that for some time back he had no longer been there—that they had taken him away over the sea, handcuffed, and with his wallet about his neck.

She said nothing. She never left the place, because she did not know where to go, and no one was expecting her anywhere. She made shift to live, doing jobs for the soldiers and the gaolers, as if she herself were a part of that great, dark, silent building; and for the *carabinieri*,

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who had taken Gramigna from her, there among the prickly-pear thickets, and had broken his leg with gun-shots, she felt a sort of respectful tenderness—an animal admiration for strength.

On holidays, when she saw them with their plumes and their glittering epaulettes, stiff and straight in their gala uniforms, she devoured them with her eyes; and she was always about the barracks, sweeping out the halls and polishing the boots, so that they nicknamed her "the dust-clout of the *carabinieri*."

Only when, at night-fall, she saw them load their guns and go out, two by two, with their trousers turned up, and revolvers slung across their chests, or when they mounted their horses, under the great lantern that gleamed upon the muzzles of the carbines, and she heard the trampling of the horses' hoofs and the clink of the scabbards die away in the darkness, then she would turn pale and shiver

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as she closed the stable doors. And when her little one played with the rest in the great square before the prison, running in and out among the soldiers' legs, and the other children would call after him, "The son of Gramigna!—the son of Gramigna!" then she would fly into a rage and pursue them, pelting them with stones.

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THE "MYSTERY."

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THE "MYSTERY."

EVERY time Uncle John told the tale, his eyes shone with tears, though one would not have believed it of him, with that grim old face of his.

They had set up the theatre in the church square, with branches of myrtle and oak, and whole boughs of olive, too, leaves and all—for no one could refuse to give anything that was his for the "Blessed Mystery."

Uncle Mommu, when he saw the sacristan in his orchard stripping and cutting off whole branches, felt the thrusts of the bill-hook in his own breast, and cried to him from afar: "Are you

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no Christian, Master Calogero, or did the priest not touch you with the holy oil, that you hack at that olive-tree so mercilessly?" But his wife, though she had tears in her eyes too, tried to soothe him: "It's for the Mystery; let him be! The Lord will send us a good season. Don't you see those crops dying of thirst?"

Yes, poor things, they were quite yellow, of a greenish-yellow like sick children, in the midst of the white earth, hard as a crust, that was consuming them, and made your throat feel dry only to look at it.

"All this is the work of Don Angelino," muttered the husband, "to get a store of firewood for himself, and all the offerings of pence that he can."

Don Angelino, the parish priest, had worked like a horse for the past week, with the sacristan, digging holes, driving in posts, hanging up little lanterns of red paper, and stretching the new

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bed-curtain of Farmer Nunzio—who had just been married—across the back of the stage, where it made a fine show in the midst of the boughs, and with the lanterns in front of it.

The Mystery represented the Flight into Egypt, and the part of the Virgin Mary had been given to Master Nanni, who was short, and had had his beard shaved off on purpose. As soon as he appeared, carrying the "Infant Jesus"—who was the son of Neighbour Menica—and saying to the thieves, "This is my flesh and blood!" the people beat their breasts with stones and cried out all together—

"*Miseremini mei*, Holy Virgin!'

But Janu and Master Cola, who were the thieves, with sham beards of sheepskin, payed no heed, but wanted to take her Blessed Son from her and carry him to Herod. The priest had known what he was about, choosing them as the thieves! True hearts of stone they were!

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and ever after, Pinto, in the quarrel that he had with Janu about the fig-tree in the orchard, would taunt him with, "You are the thief out of the 'Flight into Egypt!'"

Don Angelino, note-book in hand, kept repeating, behind Farmer Nunzio's curtain, "'Vain, O woman, are your prayers; I feel no pity. . . . I feel no pity!—' It's your turn, Master Janu," for the two were such rascals that they had even forgotten their parts! It was all very well for the Virgin Mary to beg and implore them; the crowd only murmured—

"Master Nanni is playing at being soft, because he is dressed up as *Maria Santissima*. Otherwise, he would run them both through with the clasp-knife he has in his pocket."

But when St. Joseph came upon the scene, with his white cotton-wool beard, hunting for his spouse in the wood, which only reached up to his breast,

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the crowd could hardly sit still, because the thieves, the Virgin, and St. Joseph could all have caught each other by stretching out their hands, if the "Mystery" had not been that they were to pursue one another in vain. This was what constituted the miracle. If the ruffians could have caught the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, they would have made short work of them, and of the Holy Child too, God help us!

Mistress Filippa—whose husband had been transported for having killed, with blows from his spade, the neighbour who owned the next vineyard, and who stole his prickly pears—wept like a fountain when she saw St. Joseph pursued like a rabbit by the thieves, and remembered how her husband had rushed in upon her at the little hut in the vineyard, panting, with the police-officers at his heels, and had gasped out, "Give me a drink of water. I am at the end of my strength!"

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Then they had handcuffed him, like Christ in the Garden, and had shut him up in an iron coop, to take his trial; she could still see him standing there—with his cap in his hands, and his hair, after all those months of imprisonment, tangled into one grey bush—listening to the judges and the witnesses with the yellow face of one who has been long in prison. And when they had taken him away over the sea—on which he had never been before, poor soul!—with his wallet on his back, roped together with the other convicts like a string of onions, he had turned to look at her for the last time, with that sad face of his, till he could see her no more—for no one ever returns from over-seas, and nothing more had been heard of him.

"Thou only knowest where he may be now, Mother of Sorrows!" mumbled the widow of the live man, as she crouched on her heels, praying for the poor fellow, whom she seemed to see far away

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there in the black darkness. She alone could tell what manner of anguish there must be in the heart of the Madonna, at the moment that the thieves were about to catch hold of St. Joseph by the cloak.

"Now wait and see the encounter of the patriarch St. Joseph with the ruffians!" said Don Angelino, wiping off the sweat with his pocket-handkerchief. And Trippa, the butcher, hammered away at the big drum —zum! zum! zum! that it might be understood that the thieves were attacking St. Joseph.

The women began to scream, and the rest picked up stones, to break the heads of those two cut-throats, Janu and Cola, yelling out, "Let be the patriarch St. Joseph; let him be, scoundrels that you are!"

And Farmer Nunzio, too, mindful of his curtain, screamed out "that they were not to rip it up." Then Don Angelino poked his head out of his den,

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showing a beard a week old, and tried to soothe them with words and gestures—

"Let them go on, let them go on! It is written like that in the play."

A fine play he had written—and said it was all his own invention, too! But he would have crucified the Lord with his own hands to get the three *tarì* for a mass. Had he not caused Master Rocco, the father of five sons, to be buried without a bit of a funeral, because they could not pay him anything — there, under the pavement of the church, in the dark of the evening, so that they could hardly see to let him down into his grave for eternity? And had he not expropriated Uncle Menico's little house, because it was built upon the church ground, and there was a rate of two *tarì* a year upon it that he had never been able to pay? Uncle Menico never thought, when he built the house for himself with so

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much pride, carrying the stones for it with his own hands, that one day the priest would make him sell it for that rate of two *tarì*. After all, what are two *tarì* a year? The difficulty is to get them both together at the time they fall due; and Don Angelino would say, shrugging his shoulders—

"What can I do about it, brother? It is not my money, it is the Church's."

Just like Master Calogero, the sacristan, who would go repeating, "Serve the altar, and the altar will give you bread." And now there he was, hanging on to the bell-ropes, ringing with all his might, while Trippa beat the big drum, and the women screamed, "A miracle! a miracle!"

At this point Uncle John felt his old hairs rising on end, at the remembrance of what followed. Just a year after, to a day, on the Eve of Good Friday, Nanni and Master Cola met in the same

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place at night; there was an Easter moon, and it was as light as day in the square.

Nanni stood flattened up against the church-tower to watch who went to Mistress Vénera's, for he had several times surprised her all in a commotion and dishevelled, and had heard some one slip out at the garden gate.

"Who has been with you? You had better tell the truth. If you care for some one else, I will go away, and 'good night to the band.' But understand, I won't wear *those things* on my head."

She kept protesting that it was not so, swearing by the soul of her husband, and calling to witness the images of Christ and the Madonna that hung at the head of the bed, while, with crossed hands, she kissed that same blue cotton skirt that she had lent Nanni for the part of the Virgin Mary.

"Think, think well what you are saying," he repeated. He

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did not know that Vénera had taken a fancy to Master Cola when she had seen him act the thief in the Mystery, with his sheepskin beard.

"Well," he thought, "the only thing to do is to keep a look out, like a sportsman upon a rabbit, and to convince oneself with one's own eyes."

The woman had said to the other fellow, "Beware of Master Nanni; he suspects something, to judge by the way he looks at me and ferrets about the house every time he comes."

Cola had his mother, whom he supported by his work, upon his hands, and no longer dared go to Mistress Vénera's; one, two, three days he kept off, till at last the devil tempted him with the moonlight that shone through the cracks in the shutters upon his very bed, and kept bringing before his eyes the deserted street and the widow's door at the corner of the square opposite the bell-tower.

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Nanni waited in the shadow, alone in the midst of the white, moonlit square; it was so still that one could hear the church-clock of Viagrande strike each quarter, and the dogs trotting about, sniffing at every corner and ferreting with their noses in the dust-heaps. At last a footstep was audible, creeping along by the walls; it stopped at Vénera's door, and there came a gentle knocking—once, twice; then again, lighter and quicker, like some one whose heart beats fast with desire and dread. Nanni, too, felt those knocks smiting him within his breast. Then the door opened, very slowly, showing a crack that was darker than the shadow—and a shot was heard.

Master Cola fell, crying, "*Mamma mia!* they have killed me!"

No one had seen or heard anything, for fear of the law; even Mistress Vénera said she was asleep. Only the poor

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mother, hearing the shot, felt it in her very vitals, and running just as she was to the widow's door, raised Cola in her arms, crying, "My son, my son!"

The neighbours gathered round with lights, and the only door that remained closed was that against which the mother kept hurling her curses: "Wretch, wretch, you have murdered my son!"

The mother, on her knees beside the wounded man's bed, poured out prayers to God, clasping her hands hard, with dry eyes, like a mad woman—

"O Lord, O Lord! My son, Lord God!"

Ah, what a sad Easter the Lord had sent her! Just on Good Friday, too, when the procession was going by with the drum beating, and Don Angelino crowned with thorns! Ah, how dark it was in the house, and yet through the open door could be seen the sun, and the crops growing so well—for this year

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there had been no need to pray God for fine weather, and the people left Don Angelino to flagellate himself in solitude; and when the sacristan had come to get wood out of them on the pretext of its being for the Mystery, they had threatened to break his legs with stones if he did not go away in double-quick time. In the poor mother's house alone there were tears, now that every one else was happy. In her house alone! There she lay — cast on the ground, like a heap of rags, by the wretched bed, looking quite shattered and as though she had turned decrepit all at once, with her grey hair hanging about her face. She did not hear the people who crowded into the room out of curiosity. She saw nothing but her son's dim eyes and drawn features. They had got the doctor for him, they had fetched Mother Barbara, the fortune-teller, and the poor mother had taken three *tarì* out of her

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mouth, as it were, to have a mass said for him by Don Angelino. The doctor shook his head.

"Something more is needed here than one of Don Angelino's masses," said the neighbours; "what is needed here is the sacred cotton of Fra Sanzio, the hermit, or the candle of the Madonna of Valverde, that does miracles everywhere."

The wounded man, with the sacred cotton on his breast and the candle lit before his waxen face, opened his dim eyes wide, looking at the neighbours one by one, and tried to smile at his mother with his pale lips, to make her understand that he really felt better with the miraculous cotton on his breast. He nodded his head with that sad smile that one sees on the faces of the dying when they say they are better. The doctor said quite the contrary, and that he could not outlive the night. And Don Angelino, that his wares might not be discredited, kept

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repeating, "Faith is needed for the accomplishment of miracles. Without faith, it is like washing the donkey's head.[1] Saints, relics, the sacred cotton—they are all fine things if one has faith."

Yet the poor mother had so much faith, that she talked quite familiarly with the saints and the Madonna, and would say to the blessed candle, fast and low, between her teeth, "O Lord, Lord, you will grant me mercy! You will leave me my son, O God!" And the son would listen intently, his eyes fixed on the candle, and try to smile and to nod his head in assent.

All the village went wild trying to fathom the matter, but the one who got the best of it was Mistress Vénera. Indeed, she may be said to have won the game, considering the marks of blood, which were found in the square, for Master Cola, reeling and gasping, had got, when he

[1] Meaning "a waste of trouble."

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fell, as far as the very spot where last year he had played the thief in the Mystery.

Still, Mistress Vénera was obliged to leave the village, for no one would any longer buy the bread off her counter, and they called her "Vénera the excommunicated."

Master Nanni, too, wandered about for a bit, hiding among the fields and the lava-beds: but when the first hunger of winter came upon him they caught him one night at the entrance of the village, where he was waiting for the boy who used to bring him bread in secret. He was tried and sent over seas, like Filippa's husband. If he, too, had only not taken it into his head to wear the "excommunicated" woman's petticoat, to act the part of the Blessed Virgin!

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NEDDA.

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NEDDA.

THE "domestic hearth" always seemed to me a figure of speech, suitable as a frame to some picture of the milder and more serene sort of affections, just as a ray of moonlight is suited to kissing tresses of golden hair; but I used to smile when I heard any one say that the fire on the hearth is almost a friend. It really seemed to me too necessary a friend, at once tiresome and despotic, that little by little would try to take hold of you by the hands or feet, and drag you into his smoky lair to give you a Judas' kiss. I was unacquainted with the pastime of

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poking the logs, and the voluptuous delight of bathing in the reflection of the blaze. I did not understand the language of the dry sticks that fire up in a pet, or sulkily sputter forth jets of flame. My eye was not used to the fantastic patterns that the sparks form as they flit like fireflies across the blackened embers, to the weird shapes the wood assumes as it becomes carbonised, to the thousand gradations of light and shade in the blue and red flame that curls up almost timidly, gently caressing, to flare out presently with shameless petulance. When once I was initiated into the mysteries of the tongs and the bellows, I fell desperately in love with the luxurious idleness of the chimney-corner. I leave my body upon that armchair by the fireside as I would a garment, trusting to the flames to make my blood circulate more warmly and my heart beat faster, and charging the flying sparks, that

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disport themselves like amorous butterflies, with the task of keeping my eyes open and sending my thoughts on wanderings as capricious as their own. There is an indefinable fascination about this vision of your own truant thoughts fluttering around you, then leaving you to fly far away, and stirring your heart, almost without your own knowledge, with faint breaths of sweetness or bitterness. With your cigar almost out, your eyes half-closed, and the tongs slipping from your languid grasp, you see your other self wandering away, traversing vast distances, while you seem to feel passing through your nerves, currents as of unknown atmospheres, and you experience, with a smile, and without moving a finger or taking a step, the effect of a thousand sensations, that in reality would be enough to bleach your hair and furrow your brow.

It was in one of these vagabond peregrinations of the spirit

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that the crackling of the fire, too close to me perhaps, called up to my mind's eye another huge blaze that I had seen on the vast hearth of the farm of Pino, on the lower slopes of Etna.

It was raining, and the wind howled angrily. The twenty or thirty women who were employed to gather the olives in the orchards, were drying their smoking clothes, soaked with the rain, at the fire; the most cheerful among them, those who had a few pence in their pockets, or who were in love, were singing; the others were talking over the olive harvest, which had been a bad one, the recent marriages in the parish, or the rain, which was stealing the bread out of their mouths. The old housekeeper, the bailiff's wife, was spinning, just so that the lamp hanging at the chimney-head should not burn for nothing; the great wolf-coloured dog lay with his head stretched on his forepaws towards the fire, and pricked

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up his ears at every fresh blast of wind.

Presently, while the soup was cooking, the shepherd struck up a certain tune, belonging to the mountain districts, that fairly tickled one's legs, and the girls began to skip about on the disjointed brick floor of the huge smoky kitchen, whilst the dog growled for fear they should step on his tail.

The old rags whirled gaily round, and the beans danced, too, in the pot, bubbling amid the froth that the flames blew to a head. When the girls were tired of dancing, the songs had their turn. "Nedda, Nedda the *varannisa*,"[1] cried several, "where has the *varannisa* hidden herself?"

"I am here," replied a voice from the darkest corner, where a girl was huddled upon a bundle of firewood.

[1] The peasants commonly give each other nick-names, derived from the name of their native village.

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"Oh, what are you doing there?"

"Nothing."

"Why didn't you dance?"

"Because I'm tired."

"Sing us one of your pretty songs."

"No, I don't want to sing."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"The matter is, that her mother is at death's door," replied one of her companions, just as she might have said she had a toothache.

The girl, who sat with her chin resting on her knees, raised upon the speaker a pair of great black eyes, sparkling, yet quite dry and almost apathetic, and then dropped her gaze once more, without saying a word, upon her naked feet.

Most of the girls now dispersed, chattering all at once, like magpies rejoicing over a fine feed; but two or three of them turned towards Nedda and asked "Why did you leave your mother, then?"

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"To find work."

"Where are you from?"

"I am from Viagrande, but I live at Ravanusa."

One of the liveliest of the girls, the bailiff's godchild, who was to be married at Easter to Farmer Jacopo's third son, and wore a fine gold cross round her neck, said, as she turned away, "Why, that isn't far; 'a little bird' really might bring you the bad news."

Nedda shot just such a glance after her as the dog, crouched before the fire, turned upon the wooden shoes that threatened his tail.

"No, no; Uncle John would have come to fetch me," she exclaimed, as if in answer to her own thoughts.

"Who is Uncle John?"

"He is Uncle John, of Ravanusa—every one calls him that."

"You ought to have borrowed something of Uncle John, and not left your mother," said another girl.

"He is not rich, and we

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already owe him ten *lire*! And the doctor—and the medicines—and the bread for each day? Ah, it is easy to talk!" added Nedda, shaking her head, and letting a more sorrowful note pierce, for the first time, through the rough and almost savage tones of her voice, "but to stand at the door, watching the sun go down, and thinking that there is no bread in the cupboard, no oil in the lamp, no work for the morrow, is a bitter thing, when one has a poor sick old woman, lying there in bed!"

And she went on shaking her head, after she had done speaking, without looking at any one, her dry and burning eyes betraying a degree of unconscious misery, that eyes more used to shedding tears could not have expressed.

"Your bowls, girls!" cried the housekeeper, uncovering the pot with a triumphant air. Every one gathered round the hearth, where she was ladling

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out the beans with patient parsimony. Nedda waited till the last, with her little bowl under her arm. At last there was room for her too, and the flame lit her up from head to foot.

She was a dark girl, wretchedly clad, and with the timid and yet rugged air which comes of poverty and isolation. Perhaps she might have been handsome, had not hard work and overexertion radically impaired, not only the graceful womanly outlines, but the very structure of the human form. Her hair was black, thick and tangled, loosely held together with a bit of string; her teeth were as white as ivory, and there was a certain rude charm about the features, that made her smile attractive. Her eyes were large and black, and swam in a bluish fluid; a queen would have envied that poor girl, crouched upon the last rung of the human ladder, those eyes, but that they were clouded by the sensitive shyness of

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poverty, and dulled by an apparently stupid look of sad and continuous resignation. Her limbs, stunted by carrying enormous weights, or abnormally developed by painful efforts, had become coarse without being robust. She worked as a bricklayer's labourer, when she was not moving stones from fields that were being turned up, or carrying loads into the town for some one else, or performing one or other of the harder tasks which, in those districts, are considered inferior work for a man. The vintage, the corn harvest, the olive harvest, were, for her, holidays, seasons of jubilee and pastime, rather than of work. True, they scarcely brought in half what a good long summer's day at bricklayer's work did—for that fetches no less than thirteen *soldi!*

The rags that hung about her by way of clothing only gave a grotesque appearance to what should have been the delicate

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beauty of womanhood. The most lively imagination could not have fancied that those hands, forced to the most cruel labour day by day, to digging through the frost, or on the scorching ground, or amid brambles and in ruts—that those feet, used to going bare over the snows, or over the rocks burning with the heat of the sun, and to being wounded with thorns or hardened by stones — could ever have been beautiful. No one could have told the age of this human creature; poverty had stunted her in childhood, by all the exertions that deform and harden the body, the soul and the intelligence. So it had been with her mother and her grandmother, so it would be with her daughter—and her brothers in Eve required her to preserve only such likeness to themselves as should enable her to understand their orders, and to lend them the humblest and most laborious of services.

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Nedda held out her bowl, and the housekeeper poured into it all the beans that remained in the pot, and they were not many.

"Why do you always come the last—don't you know that the last only get what there is over?" she said to the girl by way of compensation.

The poor child dropped her eyes upon the black broth that smoked in the bowl, as if she deserved the reproof, and walked away carefully, so as not to spill the contents.

"I would like to give you some of mine," said one of her more kind-hearted companions; "but, really, if it goes on raining to-morrow, I should be sorry to eat all my bread, besides losing my day's work."

"That fear doesn't trouble me," answered Nedda, with a sad smile.

"Why not?"

"Because I have no bread of my own. The little I had I left

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for my mother, with our few remaining pence."

"And do you live only on the soup?"

"Yes, I'm used to it," answered Nedda, simply.

"Accursed weather, that steals away our day's work!" swore another girl. "Here, help yourself out of my bowl."

"I am not hungry any longer," replied the *varannisa* roughly, by way of thanks.

"You that curse God's rain, don't you eat bread yourself?" said the bailiff's wife to the girl who had sworn at the bad weather; "and don't you know that rain in autumn means a fruitful year?"

A general murmur of approval followed these words.

"Yes—but your husband will take off three good half-days, all the same, from the week's pay!"

Another murmur of approval.

"And have you worked for these three half-days, then, that you should be paid for them?"

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retorted the old woman, triumphantly.

"That's true, so it is!" rejoined the others, with the instinctive sense of justice that is found among the masses, even when such justice is to the disadvantage of individuals.

The farmer's wife began to chant the rosary, then followed the "Ave Marias" with their monotonous murmur, interspersed with a few yawns. After the litanies came the prayers for the living and the dead; then poor Nedda's eyes filled with tears, and she forgot to say *Amen*.

"What do you mean by not answering *Amen?*" the old woman said to her sternly.

"I was thinking of my poor mother who is so far away," stammered Nedda, timidly.

Then the woman said "good-night," took the lamp and went away. Here and there, about the kitchen and round the fire, couches of picturesque aspect were improvised, the dying fire-

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light casting fitful lights and shadows upon the different groups and various attitudes. It was a good farm to work at—the master did not, like so many others, stint the beans for the soup, or the wood for the fire, or the litter for the couches. The women slept in the kitchen, and the men in the hay-loft. Sometimes, when a farmer is poor, or a farmhouse small, the men and women sleep pell-mell, as best they can, in the stable or elsewhere, on straw, or a few rags, the children beside their parents; and when the father is well-to-do, and has a coverlet of his own, he spreads it over all his little family; when any one feels cold, he creeps nearer to his neighbour, or thrusts his feet into the warm embers, or covers himself with straw, managing as best he can; for after one day of hard work and when another is about to begin, sleep is sound, like a kind despot—and the morals of the master are not

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too particular, except in the matter of refusing employment to a girl who, being about to become a mother, cannot do her ten hours of hard work.

Before daybreak the early risers were out, to see what the weather was going to be, and through the door, that kept slamming every instant, spurts of rain and gusts of icy wind blew in upon the remaining benumbed sleepers. With the first streaks of light came the bailiff, to open the door wide and wake up the sluggards, since it is not fair to defraud the master of one minute of the day's work, ten hours long, for which he pays his good *tarì*, or sometimes as much as three *carlini* (about sixpence!) besides the soup.

"It rains!" The hateful word ran from mouth to mouth, in ill-humoured tones. Nedda leaned against the door, sadly watching the great leaden clouds that cast their livid twilight hues upon her. The day was cold and

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misty; the shrivelled leaves dropped from the boughs, gliding down them and fluttering for a moment in the air before they fell upon the muddy ground; the rivulets were swamped in a puddle in which the pigs wallowed luxuriously; the cows showed their black noses through the gate that shut off the barn, and watched the falling rain with a melancholy eye; the sparrows, huddled under the eaves, twittered in complaining tones.

"Here's another day turned out ill!" said one of the girls, biting into a great piece of black bread.

"The clouds are lifting off the sea, down there," said Nedda, stretching out her arm; "perhaps towards midday the weather will change."

"Still, that thief of a bailiff won't pay us more than the third of our day!"

"It will be that much gain."

"Yes, but how about our bread that we are eating at a loss?"

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"And how about the loss for the master of all the olives that will be spoilt, or get overlooked in the mud?"

"That's true," said another.

"But you just try picking up a single one of those olives that will be done for in half an hour, to eat it with your dry bread, and see what the bailiff will give you into the bargain!"

"That's only fair, because the olives don't belong to us."

"But they don't belong to the earth that eats them, either."

"Ah, but the earth belongs to the master!" replied Nedda, triumphant in her logic, and with an expressive glance.

"That's true, too!" said another, who didn't know what to answer.

"For my part, I'd rather it went on raining, than to have to spend half a day on my hands and knees in the mud, in this weather, for three or four *soldi*."

"Three or four *soldi* are no

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great matter to you, aren't they, then?" exclaimed Nedda, sadly.

On Saturday evening, when the time came for settling the week's account at the bailiff's desk, with its litter of papers and fine heaps of *soldi*, the men, who were the most impatient, were paid first, then the most quarrelsome of the women, and last, and worst, the weak and timid ones. When the bailiff had made out Nedda's reckoning, she learnt that, when the two and a half days of enforced idleness were deducted, there remained a sum of forty *soldi* owing to her.

The poor girl did not dare say a word, but her eyes filled with tears.

"Now complain into the bargain, do, you cry-baby!" scolded the bailiff—for he was always scolding, like the honest bailiff that he was, looking after his master's *soldi*. "When I pay you just like the others, though you are poorer and smaller than any of them!—and I pay the

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day's work higher than any landowner in the district of Pedara, Nicolosi, and Trecastagne! Three *carlini*, besides the soup!"

"I don't complain," said Nedda, timidly, as she pocketed the few *soldi* that the bailiff, to enhance their value, had counted out in the smallest coin. "It is the fault of the bad weather that has taken away nearly half what I might have earned."

"Lay the blame on the Lord, then!" said the bailiff, roughly.

"Oh, no! but it is I who am to blame for being so poor."

"Pay that poor girl her whole week," said the landlord's son, who had come to assist at the olive harvest, to the bailiff; "it is only the difference of a few pence."

"I ought not to give her more than is fair."

"But if I tell you to!"

"All the landlords in the neighbourhood would be up in arms against us both if we 'introduced novelties.'"

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"Perhaps you're right," answered the young man, for his father was a rich landowner, and had many neighbours.

Nedda put together the few rags she possessed, and said farewell to her companions.

"Are you going to Ravanusa at this hour?" asked some.

"My mother is ill."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Yes, I'm afraid on account of these pence in my pocket; but my mother is ill, and now that I am not obliged to stay here to work, I feel as though I could not sleep if I stopped away another night."

"Shall I go with you?" asked the young shepherd, in a joking tone.

"I go with God and the Virgin," answered the poor child, simply; and she turned, with bowed head, into the path across the meadows. The sun had long been set, and the shadows were rapidly climbing to the mountain's top. Nedda walked quick-

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ly along, and as the darkness deepened, she began to sing, like a little frightened bird. At every step or two she looked behind her in alarm, and each time that a stone, dislodged by the recent rain, rolled off a wall, or that a sudden gust of wind sprinkled her with a hail of raindrops shaken from the wet leaves overhead, she would stop, trembling like a kid that has strayed from the herd. A horned owl followed her from tree to tree, with its melancholy note, and she felt quite glad of its company, and gave an answering call, that it might not weary of following her. When she passed a little chapel, at the gate of some farm, she would stop a moment in the lane to say a hasty "Ave Maria," on her guard lest the watch-dog should fly at her over the boundary-wall, behind which he was barking furiously; then off she would start again with a fleeter step, turning round once or twice to look at the little light that

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burnt at the shrine, as a homage to the Saint, and also to light the bailiff home when he came in late from the fields. That little light gave her courage, and reminded her to pray for her poor mother. Now and then some painful thought would contract her heart with a sudden pang, and then she began to run, and sing at the top of her voice, to deaden it; or she would call to mind the merriest days of the vintage, or the summer evenings, when they used to return from the plain in groups, beneath the loveliest moonlight, with the bagpipes playing merrily before them; but her thoughts always would return to the miserable pallet of her dear invalid. She stumbled over a fragment of lava as sharp as a razor, and cut her foot; the darkness was so thick that at the turnings of the lane the poor girl often ran up against the wall or the hedge, and she was beginning to lose courage and to feel uncertain of

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her whereabouts. Suddenly she heard the church-clock of Punta strike nine, so near that the strokes seemed to be falling upon her very head. Nedda smiled almost as though a friend had called her by name amid a throng of strangers. She turned gaily into the village street, singing her pretty song at the top of her voice, and holding fast in her hand, inside the pocket of her apron, her forty *soldi*. Passing before the chemist's shop, she saw him and the lawyer, wrapt in their cloaks, playing at cards. A little further on she met the poor madman of Punta, going up and down the village street from one end to the other, and humming the same old song that had been his companion for twenty years, in the winter nights as in the height of the dog-days. When she reached the first trees in the straight lane of Ravanusa, she met a pair of oxen coming slowly along and peacefully ruminating.

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"Ohé, Nedda!" cried a well-known voice.

"Is it you, Janu?"

"Yes, it is I, with the master's oxen."

"Where are you coming from?" asked Nedda, without stopping.

"From the Plain. I passed your house; your mother is expecting you."

"How is mother?"

"About the same as usual."

"God bless you!" exclaimed the girl, as if she had feared to hear worse, and began to run again.

"Good-bye, Nedda!" Janu called after her.

"Good-bye," murmured Nedda from afar.

And it seemed to her that the stars shone like suns, and that all the trees, as she recognised them one by one, spread out their boughs in protection over her head, and that the stones in the road touched her aching feet caressingly.

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The next day, which was Sunday, came the visit of the doctor, who gave to his poor patients the day he could not devote to his fields. A sad visit indeed! for the good doctor was not used to standing on ceremony with his clients, and in Nedda's cottage there was no ante-chamber, nor were there any friends of the family to whom one could explain the sick woman's real condition.

Another sad ceremony followed during the day: the priest came in his surplice, the sacristan with the consecrated oil, and two or three of the neighbouring women, muttering some sort of prayer. The sacristan's little bell tinkled shrilly amid the fields, and the waggoners who heard it stopped their mules in the middle of the road, and doffed their caps. When Nedda heard it in the stony lane, she drew up the sick woman's torn coverlet, that it might not be seen the sheets were wanting, and folded her best

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white apron over the rickety little table, propped up with bricks. Then, while the priest was performing his office, she went and knelt down outside the door, mechanically murmuring over some prayers, gazing as though in a dream at the stone by the threshold, where her old woman used to sit and warm herself in the March sun, and listening with inattentive ears to the usual sounds of the neighbourhood and the coming and going of all the people who were taken up with their own business, and had no thought of sorrow in their heads. The priest went away, and the sacristan waited in vain on the doorstep for them to give him the usual offering for the poor.

At a late hour that evening, Uncle John saw Nedda running down the road to Punta.

"Ohé! where are you going to, at this hour?"

"I'm going for a medicine that the doctor has ordered."

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Uncle John was economical, and a grumbler.

"More medicine!" he muttered, "after he has ordered the medicine of the consecrated oil! But they play into the hands of the chemist, to suck the blood of the poor! Take my advice, Nedda: save your money, and go back to sit with your old woman."

"Who knows but it might be of use!" replied the girl, sadly, dropping her eyes; and she hurried on.

Uncle John replied with a growl. Then he called after her—

"Here, *varannisa!*"

"What is it?"

"I'll go to the chemist's. I shall be quicker than you, no fear. Meanwhile you won't be leaving your poor patient alone."

The tears came into the girl's eyes.

"God bless you," said she, and tried to put the money into his hand.

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"You can give me the money another time," said Uncle John, roughly, and set off at such a pace that he seemed to have regained the legs of his young days.

The girl went back, and said to her mother, "Uncle John has gone." And her voice was softer than usual.

The dying woman heard the chink of the coppers as Nedda laid them on the table, and turned a questioning look upon her.

"He said I might give them to him some other time," answered the girl.

"May God reward him for his charity," murmured the sick woman. "Now you won't be left without a penny."

"Oh, mother!"

"How much do we owe Uncle John?"

"Ten *lire*. But don't be afraid, mother. I will work!"

The old woman gazed at her for a long time with fast-dim-

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ming eyes, and then kissed her without a word.

The next day came the sexton, the undertaker's men, and the neighbours. When Nedda had laid out the dead woman in her best clothes in the coffin, she put into her hands a carnation, that had bloomed in a broken pan, and her thickest tress of hair; she gave the men her few remaining pence, that they might use the dead woman gently, and not shake her, going over the stony lane to the graveyard; then she put the bed and the house in order, set the last glass of medicine away on the top of the dresser, and went to sit on the doorstep and look up at the sky.

A robin redbreast, the chilly bird of November, began to sing among the leaves and brambles that crowned the little wall opposite the door, and hopped about among the thorns and low shoots, looking at her with such sharp little eyes, as though it wanted

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to say something. Nedda thought how her mother had heard it sing, the day before. In the orchard next door there were olives lying on the ground, and the magpies came to peck at them; she had been wont to drive them away with stones, that the dying woman might not hear their funereal croaking; now she looked at them indifferently, and did not move. And when, on the road hard by, the seller of lupins, or the wine merchant, or the waggoners, passed, talking at the top of their voices to make themselves heard above the noise of their cart-wheels or the bells on their mules, she would say to herself, "That is so-and-so, and this is such another." When the "Ave Maria" sounded, and the evening star shone out in the sky, she remembered that she had not to go to Punta for the medicines any more; and as, little by little, the noises died away along the road, and the darkness deepened in the orchard,

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she thought how there was no longer any need to light the lamp.

Uncle John found her standing on the threshold. She had risen to her feet when she heard steps in the lane, for she had ceased to expect any one.

"What are you doing here?" asked Uncle John.

She shrugged her shoulders, without replying.

The old man sat down beside her on the doorstep, and said nothing more.

"Uncle John," began the girl, after a long silence, "now I have no one left, I can go far away to look for work; I will start for La Rocella, where the olive harvest is still going on, and when I come back I will repay you the money you lent us."

"I didn't come to ask for your money!" replied Uncle John, in surly tones.

She said no more, and they both sat silent, listening to the notes of the horned owl. Nedda

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thought that perhaps it was the same one that had followed her two nights ago, and her heart swelled.

"And have you any work?" asked Uncle John, at length.

"No; but I shall find some charitable soul to give me a little."

"I have heard tell that at Aci-Catena they pay women who are quick at wrapping the oranges in paper a franc a day, without soup, and I thought of you directly; you did some of that work last March, and must be used to it. Would you go?"

"As soon as not!"

"Then at dawn to-morrow you must be at the garden of the 'Blackbird,' where the short cut turns off to Sant' Anna."

"I could even start to-night. Poor mother! she would not cost me many days of idleness. . . ."

"Do you know where to go?"

"Yes. Besides, I can ask."

"Ask the innkeeper who lives on the high-road to Valverde, on

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the other side of the chestnut grove that is to the left of the road. Inquire for Farmer Vinirannu, and say I sent you."

"I will go," said the poor girl.

"I thought you might not have enough bread for the week," continued Uncle John, drawing a large black loaf out of his capacious coat-pocket, and laying it on the little table.

Nedda blushed, as if she herself had done the kind deed. Then, after a few minutes, she said—

"If his Reverence would say mass for mother to-morrow, I would do a couple of days' work for him, when they are gathering in the beans."

"I have had the mass said," replied Uncle John.

'Oh, the poor dead woman will pray for you, too!" murmured the girl, with great tears in her eyes.

At last, when Uncle John left her, and she heard the sound of his footsteps die away in the

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distance, she shut the door and lit the candle. Then it seemed to her that she was quite alone in the world, and she felt afraid of sleeping on the poor little bed where she had been wont to lie down beside her mother.

The village girls spoke ill of her because she had gone to work the very day after her mother's death, and because she had not put on black; and his Reverence scolded her severely when, the following Sunday, he saw her on the doorstep sewing at an apron that she had had dyed black—her only, humble sign of mourning—and he took occasion therefrom to preach in Church against the bad habit of not observing feast-days and Sundays. The poor child, to earn pardon for her heavy sin, went to work two days in the priest's field, that he might say mass for her dear dead one, the first Monday in the month. And on Sunday, when the girls in

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their fine holiday clothes edged away from her on the bench, or laughed at her, and the youths, in coming out of church, addressed coarse pleasantries to her, she would drop her eyes and quicken her steps, drawing her ragged *mantellina* closer round her, without a single bitter thought to disturb the peacefulness of her prayers; or she would say to herself, as though it were a well-deserved reproof, "I am so poor!"—or, looking at her two stout arms, "Praised be the Lord who gave them to me!" and go her way with a smile.

One evening, just after putting out the light, she heard a well-known voice in the lane, lustily trolling out snatches of the peasant songs of the district, with their melancholy oriental cadences: "*Ere long I shall go to see her, the mistress of my soul.*" "It is Janu," she whispered to herself, while her heart leapt in her bosom like a startled bird—

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and she hid her head under the coverlet.

And the next morning, when she opened the window, she saw Janu, in his fine new fustian suit—into the pockets of which his hands, blackened and hardened with work, were trying to stuff themselves—with a splendid new kerchief of scarlet silk peeping coquettishly forth from his waiscoat-pocket, leaning against the low wall of the orchard and enjoying the beautiful April sun.

"Why, Janu!" said she, as if she had known nothing at all about it.

"Greeting!" exclaimed the youth, with his broadest smile.

"What are you doing here?"

"I am just back from the Plain."

The girl smiled, and stood watching the larks that, at that early hour, were still hopping about on the grass.

"You have come back with the larks."

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"The larks go where there is millet—and I where there is bread."

"What do you mean?"

"The master has dismissed me."

"Oh, why?"

"Because I had taken the fever down there, and could only work three days a week."

"One can see it by your looks, poor Janu!"

"Accursed Plain!" swore Janu, stretching out his arm towards it.

"You know, mother . . .?" said Nedda.

"Yes, Uncle John told me."

She said no more, and gazed over the wall into the orchard. A mist rose up from the damp stones; the drops of dew sparkled on every blade of grass; the almond trees, laden with bloom, rustled softly and scattered their pink and white flowers, that scented the air, upon the roof of the little cottage; a sparrow, at once bold and mistrustful, twit-

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tered under the eaves, chirping threateningly, after its fashion, at Janu, whom it half-suspected, from his looks, of having designs upon its nest, of which a few indiscreet straws peeped out among the tiles. The church-bell was ringing for mass.

"How pleasant *our* country feels!" exclaimed Janu.

"I recognised your voice last night," said Nedda, turning red, and digging up with a potsherd the earth in the pan where her flowers grew. He turned away, and lit his pipe, as a man should do.

"Good-bye, I am going to mass," said Nedda, suddenly, after a long silence.

"Look here, I have brought you this from the town," said the young fellow, spreading out his beautiful silk kerchief.

"Oh—it is lovely!—but it's too good for me!"

"Why, so long as it costs you nothing?" replied the youth, with a countryman's logic.

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She blushed, as if the expense to which he had gone gave her a measure of the warmth of his feelings; smiling, she shot him a glance that was half caressing and half wild, and ran into the house; then, when she heard his thick shoes upon the stones of the little lane, she put out her head to watch him as he went away.

At mass all the girls in the village had a chance of seeing Nedda's smart new kerchief, printed over with roses "that looked good to eat," and upon which the sun, shining through the windows of the little church, sent down his brightest rays! And when she passed in front of Janu, who was by the first cypress tree in the enclosure before the church, leaning his shoulders against the wall and smoking his carved pipe, she felt her face grow hot and her heart beat tumultuously in her breast, and she slipped quickly by.

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The young man followed after her, whistling, and watching her as she stepped lightly along, without turning round, in her new fustian dress with its fine, heavy folds, her stout little shoes, and her scarlet head-kerchief — for the poor little ant, now that her mother, being in paradise, was no longer on her hands, had succeeded in getting herself together something of an outfit with her work.

Among all the miseries of the poor, there is this as well—that the most grievous losses of the heart are yet a relief.

Nedda heard — with great pleasure or great alarm, she scarcely knew which—the heavy step of the youth behind her, and kept watching, upon the whitish dust of the road that stretched out straight before her, bathed in sunlight, that other shadow which every now and then detached itself from her own. All at once, when she came in sight of her cottage, she

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began to run, without any reason, like an amorous fawn.

Janu caught her up; she leaned against the door, all rosy and smiling, and fetched him a thump on the back—"There!"

He hit back with rather heavy-handed gallantry.

"Well, how much did you pay for your kerchief?" asked Nedda, taking it from her head, to spread it out in the sun and look at it with a joyful air.

"Five *lire*," answered Janu, not without pride.

She smiled, but did not look at him; she laid the kerchief carefully together again, following the marks which showed where it had been folded before, and began to hum a little song which had not been on her lips for a long time. The broken pan on the window-sill was full of carnation-buds.

"What a pity," said Nedda, "that there are none in flower!" and she broke off the largest bud and gave it him.

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"What use is it to me if it isn't in bloom?" said he, without understanding her, and he threw it away.

She turned aside. "Where shall you go to work now?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

He shrugged his shoulders: "Where shall *you* go to-morrow?"

"To Bongiardo."

"I shall soon find work—only the fever mustn't come back!"

"You mustn't stay out at night, singing at house-doors!" she said, all of a blush, rocking herself against the doorpost with a coquettish air.

"I won't do it again if you don't wish me to."

She gave him a slap and ran indoors.

"Ohé, Janu!" called Uncle John from the road.

"I'm coming," cried Janu—and to Nedda:

"I'll go to Bongiardo too, if they will have me."

"Look here, my lad," said Uncle John to him when he

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reached the high-road, "Nedda has no one left, and you are a good fellow, but all the same it isn't well for you to be together. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you, Uncle John; but if God wills, after the harvest, when I have saved up the little bit of money that is needful, it will be very well for us to be together."

Nedda, who had been listening from behind the orchard wall, grew red, though there was no one to see her.

The next morning, before daybreak, when she came to the door, ready to start, she found Janu, with his bundle slung on his stick.

"Where are you going?" she inquired.

"I am going to Bongiardo too, to look for work."

The sparrows, awakened by hearing voices so early, began to chirp inside their nests. Janu slung Nedda's bundle upon his stick too, and they set off with alacrity. As they went, the sky

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in the east flushed red with the first flames of daylight, and the breeze became chill.

At Bongiardo there was indeed work enough for everybody. The price of wine had gone up, and a rich landowner was having a large tract of land in his enclosures turned up, to be planted with vineyards. This land yielded twelve hundred francs a year in olives and lupins; planted with vineyards, it would yield, in five years, twelve or thirteen thousand francs, with an outlay of only ten or twelve thousand; and the olive trees that were to be cut down would cover the half of that expense. It was an excellent speculation, as may readily be seen, and the owner was willing to give a handsome day's pay to the peasants who worked at preparing the land—thirty *soldi* to the men and twenty to the women, without soup. It is true that it was rather heavy work, and that one wore out at it even the few rags which made up

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the peasant's work-a-day dress; but Nedda was not used to earning twenty *soldi* every day. The overseer noticed that Janu, in filling the baskets with stones, always left the lightest for Nedda, and threatened to turn him away. The poor fellow, not to lose his bread altogether, had to submit to have his wage lowered from thirty to twenty *soldi*.

The worst of it was that these fields, having been so little cultivated, were almost without farm-buildings, and at night men and women had to sleep pell-mell in one single barn, that had no door; and the nights were still rather cold. Janu was always warm enough, and gave Nedda his fustian jacket that she might cover herself up well. Then on Sundays the whole party would go wandering off down the different roads.

Janu and Nedda had taken a short cut, and were strolling through the chestnut - wood, chattering and laughing to-

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gether, singing snatches of song, and making the great copper *soldi* chink in their pockets. The sun was as hot as in June; the distant fields were already turning yellow; there was a holiday air about the shade cast by the trees, and the grass that grew under them was still green and dewy.

Towards midday they sat down in the cool to eat their black bread and their white onions. Janu had wine too, good Mascali wine that he gave to Nedda without stint, and the poor girl, who was not used to it, felt her tongue grow thick and her head heavy. Every now and then they looked at each other and laughed, without knowing why.

"If we were husband and wife we might eat our bread and drink our wine together every day," said Janu, with his mouth full—and Nedda dropped her eyes, because he looked at her in an odd way.

Everywhere reigned the deep,

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noonday silence, the smallest leaves were motionless and there was scarcely any shade; a stillness, a warmth, a buzzing of insects, seemed to hang in the air and weigh luxuriously on the eyelids. All at once, a fresh breeze, coming from the sea, stirred the topmost boughs of the chestnuts.

"It will be a good year for rich and poor," said Janu, "and if God wills, I shall put by a little money at harvest-time . . . and if you cared for me . . .!" and he handed her the bottle.

"No, I won't drink any more," said she, her cheeks all flushed and red.

"Why are you so red?" said he, laughing.

"I won't tell you."

"Is it because you have drunk wine?"

"No!"

"Because you love me?"

She gave him a blow on the shoulder and began to laugh.

From afar was heard the bray-

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ing of a donkey that smelt the fresh grass.

"Do you know why the donkeys bray?" asked Janu.

"Tell me why, if you know."

"Yes, I know; they bray because they are seeking for their mate," said he, with a coarse laugh, and he looked hard at her.

She dropped her eyes as though she saw flames dancing before her, and it seemed to her as if all the wine she had drunk were rising to her head, and all the heat of that molten sky were coursing through her veins.

"Let us go," she cried angrily, shaking her heavy head.

"What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know—but let us go away."

"Do you love me?"

Nedda nodded her head.

"Will you be my wife?"

She looked at him calmly, and pressed his hard hand fast between her two brown ones; yet she rose upon her knees—

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which trembled—to get up and go away. He held her back by her dress, quite overcome, and stammering incoherent words, as if not knowing what he did.

When they heard the cock crowing from the farm hard by, Nedda sprang to her feet with a start, and looked round her in alarm. "Let us go, let us go," she said, all red and in haste.

When she was about to turn the corner by her little cottage, she stopped a moment in trepidation, almost as if she expected to find her old woman upon the threshold, deserted these six months.

Easter came—the joyous outdoor holiday, with its gigantic bonfires, its bright processions through the meadows fast growing green, and under the trees laden with blossom; with the church in its festive trim, the doors of the houses festooned

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with garlands, and the girls in their pretty new summer dresses.

Nedda was seen leaving the confessional in tears, and she did not appear among the girls kneeling in front of the choir, awaiting the communion.

From that day no honest girl would speak to her, and when she went to mass she found no room on her usual bench, and had to stay on her knees all the time; if they saw her weep, they pictured who knows what dreadful sins to themselves, and turned their backs upon her in horror.

And those who gave her work took advantage of this to diminish her day's pay. She was expecting her affianced lover, who had gone reaping on the Plain to scrape together the little money that was needed to set up something of a home and to pay his Reverence. One evening, while she was spinning, she heard a bullock cart stop at the entrance of the lane, and Janu appeared before her, pale and altered.

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"What is the matter?" she asked.

"I have been ill. The fever laid hold of me again on that accursed Plain, and I have lost more than a week's work, and spent the few pence I had earned."

She went hastily indoors, unsewed the thin palliasse, and offered him the little hoard that she had there, tied up in a stocking-foot.

"No," said he; "to-morrow I will go to Mascalucia for the pruning of the olives, and I sha'n't need anything. After the pruning is over, we will be married."

He wore a sad look as he made her this promise, and stood leaning against the doorpost, his handkerchief wound about his head, looking at her with strange, shining eyes.

"But you have the fever still,' said Nedda.

"Yes; but now that I am here it will leave me; and at any

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rate it only takes hold of me every three days."

She looked at him without speaking, and felt her heart sink as she saw how pale and thin he had grown.

"And will you be able to keep your footing on the high boughs?" she asked.

"God will see to that," replied Janu. "Good-bye; I cannot keep the waggoner waiting who gave me a place on his cart up from the Plain as far as here. To our next meeting, soon!" and yet he did not move.

When at last he went, she kept him company as far as the high-road, and saw him go away without a tear, though it seemed to her as though she were watching him go for the last time; her heart contracted a little once more, like a sponge that has not been squeezed dry—that was all, and he greeted her by name at the turning of the road.

Three days later she heard a

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great commotion along the road, and, looking over the little wall, she saw, in the midst of a group of peasants and neighbours, Janu, lying on a ladder, as pale as a washed-out rag, his head bound up in a blood-stained handkerchief. As they went along the weary, sorrowful way to his cottage, he held her by the hand, and told her how, being weak from the fever, he had fallen from a high bough and done himself that grievous hurt.

"Your heart had given you warning of it," he murmured, with a sad smile.

She listened to him with her great eyes wide open, pale as he was, and holding his hand. Next day he died.

Then Nedda, feeling that move within her which the dead man had left her as a sad remembrance, would have run to the church to pray the Holy Virgin for him.

On the church porch she met the priest, who knew of her

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shame, and she hid her face in her veil, and turned back again in her desolation. Now, when she sought for work, they laughed in her face; not for scorn of the fallen girl, but because the poor mother could no longer work as before. After the first refusals and the first bursts of laughter, she dared seek no further, but shut herself up in her cottage, like a little wounded bird that goes and hides away in its nest. The few pence she had hoarded up in the stocking went one by one, and after them the smart new dress and the pretty silk kerchief. Uncle John gave her what help he could, with that indulgent and compensating charity without which the morality of the priest is unjust and sterile, and so prevented her from dying of hunger.

She gave birth to a puny sickly baby-girl; when they told her it was not a boy, she wept as she had wept that evening when she shut the door of the

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cottage after the departing bier, and found herself alone without her mother—but she would not let them carry the child to "the Wheel." [1]

"Poor little one! Let her at least begin to suffer as late as possible," she said.

The neighbouring women called her bold-faced, because she had not been hypocritical before and was not unnatural now. The poor baby wanted for milk, since the mother was in need of bread. It dwindled rapidly, and Nedda tried in vain to squeeze between its famished lips the blood of her breast.

One winter evening, about sunset, while the snow was falling on the roof and the wind shook the ill-closed door, the poor little one, cold and livid, with its tiny hands contracted, fixed its glassy eyes

[1] The place where foundlings used to be deposited to be received into asylums.

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upon the burning ones of its mother, gave one convulsive movement, and stirred no more.

Nedda shook it, strained it to her breast with savage energy, tried to warm it with her breath and her kisses; then, when she saw that it was really dead, she laid it upon the bed where her mother had slept, and knelt down before it, her eyes open wide beyond measure and quite dry.

"Oh, blessed are ye that are dead!" she exclaimed. "Oh, blessed art thou, Holy Virgin, who hast taken away my little one, that she might not suffer like me!"

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WAR BETWEEN SAINTS

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WAR BETWEEN SAINTS.

ALL at once, while San Rocco was going peacefully on his way, under the canopy, with the dogs following in leash,[1] and a great number of lighted tapers all round, and the band, and the procession, and the crowd of worshippers, there arose a tremendous hurly-burly, every one flying helter-skelter—a very devil of a row, the priests running away with their cassocks in the air, the musicians laying about them with the trombones and clarionets, the

[1] San Rocco is always represented with a dog.

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women screaming, the blood flowing in rivulets, and blows raining down like rotten pears, under the nose of blessed San Rocco himself. The magistrate, the syndic, and the *carabinieri* hastened to the spot; the broken bones were carried to the hospital; the worst of the rioters went to spend the night in prison, the Saint went back into church at a run rather than at the dignified pace of a procession, and the *festa* came to an end like the farces of Pulcinello.

And all because of the jealousy of the people in San Pasquale's quarter! That year the devotees of San Rocco had spent their last penny to do things in grand style; the band had come from the town, more than two thousand *mortaretti*[1] had been fired off, and there was even a new banner, all embroidered with gold, that weighed over a hundredweight, it was said, and looked like "a golden foam" when it was held up amongst the

[1] A kind of very small mortar.

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crowd. Of course all this could not but touch the people of San Pasquale to the quick, so much so that at last one of them lost patience, and began shouting, as pale as death, "Long live San Pasquale!" Then the blows began. For to go and say "Long live San Pasquale" to the very face of San Rocco in person, is no more nor less than a provocation—as though some one should spit at your house, or amuse himself with pinching the woman you have on your arm. In such a case you fear neither heaven nor hell, and cast under foot such respect as you have for the rest of the saints as well, for after all, they are all related amongst themselves. If you are in church, the benches go up in the air; in a procession, fragments of torches rain down like bats; and at table, the soup-bowls begin to fly.

"A thousand devils!" yelled Master Nino, all bruised and knocked about; "let's just see

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who will dare to cry 'Long live San Pasquale' again!"

"I will!" retorted in a fury Turi, the tanner, who was to be his brother-in-law, and was beside himself on account of a blow he had got in the *mêlée*, which had half blinded him. "'Long live San Pasquale' to the death!"

"For the love of God! for the love of God!" screamed his sister Saridda, throwing herself between her brother and her sweetheart—they had all three been walking along in love and harmony till that very moment.

Master Nino, her affianced lover, kept shouting in mockery, "Long live my boots—long live San Stivale!" [1]

"There!" yelled Turi, foaming at the mouth, his eye swollen and as purple as an egg-plant. "Take that for San Rocco, you with your boots!—take that, I say!"

And they went on exchanging

[1] A play on the resemblance between the words *Pasquale* and *stivale* (boot).

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blows that would have felled an ox, till their friends succeeded in parting them by dint of cuffs and kicks. Saridda herself had got heated, and screamed "Long live San Pasquale!" too, so that she nearly came to blows with her lover, just as if they had already been man and wife.

On these occasions parents and children will pull each other by the hair, and husbands and wives separate, if by ill-luck some one of San Pasquale's quarter has married into that of San Rocco.

"I won't hear another word about the fellow," vociferated Saridda, with her hands on her hips, when the neighbours asked how the marriage had come to be broken off—"not if they bring him to me dressed in gold and silver, do you hear!"

"Saridda may grow mouldy for me!" said Master Nino, on his part, while they were washing his blood-stained face at the tavern. "A parcel of beggars and idlers in that tanners'

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quarter! I must have been drunk when the fancy took me to go there for a sweetheart."

"Since things are so!" the syndic had announced, "and a saint cannot be carried through the square without blows, so that it is a positive disgrace, I will have no more feasts or 'forty hours,'[1] and if they do but bring out the smallest taper, I will send them all to prison!"

It had indeed become a serious business, for the bishop of the diocese had granted to the priests of San Pasquale the privilege of wearing hoods. The parishioners of San Rocco, whose priests wore no hoods, had been all the way to Rome, to clamour at the very feet of the Holy Father, with legally stamped documents in hand, and everything; but it had been all in vain,

[1] The "forty hours" is a festival during which, for that length of time, the sacrament is exposed to view on the high altar.

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since their adversaries of the lower town, whom every one could remember without shoes to their feet, had become as rich as pigs since they had taken to this new tanners' industry; and we all know that in this world justice is bought and sold like the soul of Judas. They were expecting the bishop's delegate to visit the parish of San Pasquale; he was a man of sense, who wore two silver buckles, each of half a pound's weight, on his shoes, for some one had seen them; and he was coming to bring their hoods to the canons. So they too had sent for the band to go and meet Monsignore's delegate three miles outside the village, and it was said that in the evening there would be fireworks in the square, and a great "Long live San Pasquale," in plain letters. The inhabitants of the upper town were consequently in a state of ferment, and some of the most excitable went to work peeling cudgels of pear or cherry-

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wood as large as poles, muttering—

"If there is to be music, we must beat time to it!"

The bishop's delegate ran a great risk of coming out of his triumphal entry with broken bones. But his Reverence, with much cunning, left the band to wait for him outside the village, and came quietly, on foot and by short cuts, to the vicar's house, where he caused the heads of the rival parties to assemble. When these good people found themselves face to face, after all the time they had been at variance together, they began to look at the whites of each other's eyes, very much as though they felt a strong desire mutually to tear out the same; and it needed all the authority of his Reverence, who had put on his new cloth cloak for the occasion, to let the ices and other refreshments be served without unseemly occurrences.

"That's right!" said the

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syndic approvingly, with his nose in his glass; "when you want me in the interests of peace, you will always find me."

The delegate said that he had indeed come in a spirit of conciliation, with the olive-branch in his mouth, like Noah's dove; and he went about with an appearance of much fervour, distributing smiles and shakes of the hand, and saying—

"You gentlemen will do me the honour of coming to take chocolate in the vestry, the day of the *festa*."

"Let the *festa* be," said the vice-magistrate; "if not, other troubles will arise."

"Troubles will arise if these high-handed ways are permitted, so that a man is no longer allowed to amuse himself and spend his money as he pleases!" exclaimed Bruno the wheelwright.

"I wash my hands of it. The orders of the Government are precise. If you have the *festa*,

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I shall send for the *carabinieri*. I will have order!"

"*I* am answerable for the public order!" declared the syndic, rapping on the floor with his umbrella, and directing his glance slowly round the room.

"Bravo! as if every one didn't know that the man who 'blows your bellows for you' in the Council is your brother-in-law Bruno!" retorted the vice-magistrate.

"And you make opposition because you can't get over your spite about that infringement of the law against hanging the clothes out!"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" the delegate kept saying persuasively, "we shall bring about nothing in this way!"

"We shall bring about a revolution, that's what we shall do!" yelled Bruno, waving his hands.

Fortunately the vicar had hastily put the coffee-cups and glasses out of the way, and the

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sacristan had scampered off at full speed to dismiss the band, which, having heard of the delegate's arrival, was hurrying up to welcome him, blowing into the horns and clarionets.

"Nothing will be done in this way!" muttered the delegate; and he was annoyed, too, to think that the crops were already ripe over there where he lived, while he was wasting his time here over Master Bruno and the vice-magistrate, who were ready to eat each other's souls. "What is this tale about hanging the clothes out?"

"The usual domineering ways. Nowadays you can't spread out a pocket-handkerchief at the window but they clap a fine on you. The vice-magistrate's wife, trusting to her husband's being in office—for until now there has always been some little respect shown for the authorities — used to hang her week's washing out to dry on the terrace — you understand

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. . . . those few little gifts of God! But now, with this new law, it is a mortal sin; and even the dogs and cats, and other animals—with your leave—that up to this time used to keep the streets clean, are forbidden; and God grant that at the next rainfall we may not all be choked by the refuse! The real truth is, however, that Bruno, the assessor, has a spite against the vice-magistrate, because of a decision he gave against him."

The delegate, to conciliate the people, sat nailed in the confessional, like an owl, from morning till night, and all the women wanted to be confessed by the bishop's representative, who could give plenary absolution from all sorts of sins, just as though he had been Monsignore himself.

"Father," began Saridda, with her nose against the grating of the confessional, "Master Nino causes me to sin every Sunday in church."

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"How is that, my daughter?"

"He was to have been my husband, before there was all this commotion in the place; but now that the marriage is broken off, he goes and stands near the high altar to stare and laugh at me with his friends, through the whole of the blessed mass."

And when his Reverence tried to touch Master Nino's heart—

"On the contrary, it is she who turns her back on me whenever she sees me, as if I were a beggar," the young peasant would reply.

He, on the other hand, if Mistress Saridda happened to pass through the square on Sunday, would affect to be very thick with the police-sergeant, or some other important personage, and took no notice of her.

Saridda was very busy preparing little lanterns of coloured paper, and would range them along the window-sill under his

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very nose, on pretence of hanging them out to dry.

Once they met at a christening, and did not even exchange greetings, just as if they had never met before; Saridda even began to coquet with the baby girl's godfather.

"A pretty sort of godfather!" sneered Nino; "godfather to a girl! When a girl is born the very rafters of the roof give way!"

And Saridda, pretending to talk to the mother, "It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Sometimes, when you think you've lost a treasure, you ought to give thanks to God and San Pasquale; for before really knowing a person well, one has to eat seven measures of salt."—

"Indeed, one must take trouble as it comes, and the greatest mistake is to make bad blood over things that aren't worth it. When one Pope dies they make another."—

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"There is a fate about the birth of children, just as there is about marriages; for it is better to marry some one who really loves you and has no selfish ends in view, even though he may have no property of his own, nor fields, nor mules, nor anything."

The crier's drum was beating in the square. "The syndic says the *festa* will take place!" it was whispered among the crowd.

"I will go to law and fight it out while the world lasts! I may be reduced to my last coin, and with nothing but a shirt to my back, like holy Job, but that fine of five *lire* I will not pay! not though I should have to leave it written in my will!" swore the vice-magistrate.

"Blood of a dog! What do they want a *festa* for, if we are all to die of hunger this year?" exclaimed Nino.

Since the month of March not a drop of rain had fallen, and the crops, all yellow and crackling

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like so much tinder, were "dying of thirst." However, Bruno the wheelwright said that when San Pasquale had been carried forth in procession, it would be sure to rain. But what did rain matter to him, a wheelwright, or to any of the others of his party, tanners?

They did, in fact, carry San Pasquale in procession, to east and west, and held him aloft, looking down the hillside, to bless the fields, one sultry day in May, when the sky was heavy with clouds—one of those days that make the peasants tear their hair at the sight of their burnt-up fields, and the ears of corn droop as if they were really dying.

"Accursed San Pasquale!" cried Nino, as he ran like a madman among his crops; "you have ruined me, San Pasquale; you have left me nothing but a sickle to cut my throat with!"

In all the upper town there was mourning and lamentation. It was one of those endless bad

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seasons when the famine begins in June, and the women stand idle and dishevelled about the doorsteps, with eyes fixed upon vacancy. Mistress Saridda, when she heard that Master Nino's mule was to be sold in the market-place to pay the rent of his land, which had brought in nothing, felt her wrath blow over in a moment, and sent her brother Turi in all haste to help him with their little savings.

Nino stood in the corner of the market-place with an absent gaze, his hands in his pockets, while they were selling his mule, which was all decked out and had a new halter.

"I want nothing," he replied, surlily; "I shall still have my two arms, please God! A nice saint, that San Pasquale, eh?"

Turi turned his back, to prevent the affair from coming to an unpleasant conclusion, and went away. In truth, the people were in an exasperated state of mind since San Pasquale had

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been carried in procession to east and west with that fine result. The worst of it was that a good many of those from the quarter of San Rocco had been induced, for love of the crops, to walk in the procession too, thumping themselves like asses, and wearing crowns of thorns. Now they vented their disgust in violent language, so much so that Monsignore's delegate had to beat a retreat, on foot and without a band, as he had come.

The vice-magistrate, to revenge himself on the wheelwright, sent telegrams to the effect that the populace was excited, and the public order compromised; so that one fine day the news went abroad that the soldiers had arrived during the night, and any one that liked could go and look at them in their quarters.

"They have come on account of the cholera," said others, however. "Down there in the city people are dying like flies."

The chemist padlocked his

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shop-door, and the doctor ran away the first of all, for fear of being knocked on the head.

"It won't be much," said the few inhabitants who, not being able to take flight into the country to right and left, had remained in the village: "blessed San Rocco will watch over his village, and we will give a dressing to the first man who is found prowling about at night." [1]

Those of the lower town, too, had hastened barefoot to the church of San Rocco. Nevertheless, soon after, the deaths began to be more frequent, like the big drops that foretell the storm; though people would say of one man that he was a pig, and had brought about his own death by a surfeit of prickly pears, and of another, that he had returned from the fields after

[1] A belief still prevails among certain of the Italian peasantry that the cholera is the result of poison spread about secretly by persons in the pay of the Government and the doctors.

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nightfall. However, here the cholera was, and no mistake, in spite of the watch that was kept, and right under San Rocco's very nose; though an old woman in odour of sanctity dreamed that San Rocco in person had said to her: "Don't be afraid of the cholera; I am looking after it, and I am not like that good-for-nothing of a San Pasquale."

Nino and Turi had not met since the affair of the mule; but as soon as the peasant heard that both the brother and sister were ill, he hurried to their house, and found Saridda, her face all black and drawn, lying in the wretched little room beside her brother, who was better himself, but was tearing his hair, and at his wits' end what to do.

"Ah, San Rocco, you thief!" groaned Nino. "I didn't expect this! Oh, Mistress Saridda, don't you know me any more—Nino, he whom you knew of old?"

Mistress Saridda looked at him

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with such sunken eyes, that one needed a lantern to find them; and from Nino's own eyes flowed two fountains of tears. "Ah, San Rocco!" he kept saying, "this is a worse turn than the one San Pasquale did me!"

However, Saridda got well, and as she stood at the door with her head tied up in a handkerchief, and as yellow as virgin wax, she would say to him: "San Rocco performed a miracle for me, and you must come with me and bring him a taper for his festival."

Nino nodded his head, with a full heart; but meanwhile he had taken the sickness himself, and was at death's door.

Then Saridda tore her face, and said she would die with him, and that she would cut off her hair and put it into his coffin, for that no one should see her face again as long as she lived.

"No, no!" Nino would reply, his face all distorted—"the hair will grow again, but it is I who

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shall see you no more, for I shall be dead!"

"A fine miracle San Rocco has done for you!" Turi would say to him by way of consolation. And still, when they were both convalescent, and stood warming themselves in the sun, with long, thin faces and shoulders to the wall, they would keep on throwing San Rocco and San Pasquale at each other's heads.

One day Bruno the wheelwright, who had returned from the country since the cholera was over, went by and said: "We want to have a grand *festa*, to return thanks to San Pasquale for having saved us from the cholera. From this time forward there will be no more oppositions or agitators, since that vice-magistrate is dead, who has left strife behind him, even in his will."

"Yes, a *festa* for those who are dead!" sneered Nino.

"And are you alive by favour of San Rocco, then?"

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"Will you make an end of it," Saridda burst out—"or there will have to be another cholera to bring peace again!"

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